INHERENT THREATS TO THE AMERICAN WAY OF LIFE:
Privacy and Isolation in the United States

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INHERENT THREATS TO THE AMERICAN WAY OF LIFE:
Privacy and Isolation in the United States

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Abstract:

Equality, freedom, and individualism characterize basic American traditions and values and are imperative for sustaining American democratic institutions. However, these values can have detrimental effects if they are backed by selfish motives. Community interaction and social capital must work together with these values for them to be beneficial to our societies, and build a quality and meaningful ways to live. Americans value their privacy and personal space to an extent that could be damaging to their social ecology. The values that the United States was built on have become individualized and selfish and have detrimental potential for their communities, society, and nation. Today, these damaging affects are exasperated by modern life in the United States. Technology, sprawl, and bureaucratic systems have facilitated a selfish motivation for the practice and distribution of these values among our society. This has resulted in the weakening of American social institutions, community relations, and civil participation over the past three to four decades. The negative effects of this, foreseen and unforeseen, are numerous and dangerous; however, we may be able to turn things around.

Introduction: The World is Flat?

Are Americans becoming more isolated in an age of allegedly growing interconnectedness? As we experience rapidly advancing technology and globalization, some may argue that people are "closer" to one another than ever before in history, that "the world is flat" so to speak. In spite of these connections to the world and other people, many scholars have observed patterns of increasing isolation in the way people live day to day, especially in America. While some may argue that this era is bringing people of the world together, there is a compelling debate as to whether this same era may be separating people into their private realms more than ever. In this essay, I hope to understand the substance behind the assumptions of increased privacy and isolation in the United States in today's world, including the causes and effects of this on us as a society and a nation.

Changes in community life, such as advances in technology, fluctuations in demographic and economic makeup, and changing levels of political and civic involvement, affect the welfare of individuals, as well as the survival of societies. The way we live in the public and private realms of society, and the changes we endure together are important to study, because they determine the direction we are headed in the future, as individuals, as a society, and as a nation. We can analyze these changes by examining the nature of our interactions with others, and the resulting affects on one another as well as the balance, or lack thereof, that public and private interaction have on our well-being as individuals and as groups. The future effects of social change are important to study because they have a direct affect on our quality of life and well-being.

By understanding our state of social welfare we can preserve a certain quality of life for future generations.

What causes changes in our community life, and what consequences do these changes suggest for us in the future? In order to answer these questions, we must first define what a community is. We all have many communities to which we belong, groups of individuals with which we share common interests, experiences, history and geography. According to Webster's definition, a community is a unified body of individuals with some shared quality that promotes social solidarity and social cohesion (Merriam-Webster). Communities facilitate relationships between people in order to connect them by some common interest to the larger society; they serve to promote social responsibility among their members. People in communities are accountable to one another to keep order through basic mores and traditions. Not only are communities imperative for order in the larger society, but they are also vital to individuals because they provide the necessary relationships humans depend on for support and well-being. Community is the context in which we form our individual identities.

The separation of our public life from our private lives, along with the codependent relationship between the two, affects how communities interact, and how effective communities are in serving a productive purpose to individuals and society. Private and public life can be characterized by the nature of the relationships and interactions that they harbor, and the environments in which these relationships and interactions take place. Private life is defined by interactions in primary groups, primarily interactions between people who have deeply intimate relationships, as exemplified by home life or time spent with family. Private life is also characterized by the time we

spend completely alone, including times that we are totally surrounded by people without any personal interaction with them. One man, Matthew Arnold, addressed this particular form of privacy by saying "in the sea of life enisled…/we mortal millions live alone," we can be alone, even in a crowd (Bellah, 281).

Public life consists of our social networks, outings with friends and acquaintances, community involvement and informal social connections. Public life is made up primarily of secondary relationships, and environments that are capable of building social solidarity. Advances in technology, increased mobility, and declines in civic and political involvement in the past three to four decades cause some to wonder whether Americans are spending too much time in private and neglecting their public lives and duty to their communities. As more people move inside toward technological connections and away from nature and human connections, we are seeing the psychosocial affects of isolation on people more and more. Obesity, increased diagnosis of learning and concentration problems such as Attention Deficit Disorder, and increased suicide and homicide rates are just a few examples of the affects of isolation on individuals. Not only does isolation create a negative living environment for individuals, but these individuals in turn make up a society suffering from the detrimental affects of disconnection of community as a whole. If life in the public realm is waning, what could be the implications of such? In recent decades, there seems to be an increasing emphasis on privacy. Everyone "needs their space," a place to be alone, solace from the constantly interconnected, overactive, over-stimulated life of the 21st century. The implications of our overactive lifestyles create a need for increasing personal space and alone time to

recuperate and relax. This sends us spiraling into a lonely, private realm that is ever more disconnected from other humans rather than more interconnected.

Traditional American Ideals: 19th Century to Present Day

For centuries, scholars have been intrigued by the social changes unique to the democracy of the United States. My investigation of the transition of American social life focuses on the work of three specific authors: Alexis de Tocqueville, Robert Bellah and his team, and Robert Putnam. These three authors give an interesting background and insight into what American society has emerged from and where it is heading in 21st century.

<u>Alexis de Tocqueville: Individualism and Equality</u>

Alexis de Tocqueville was a French political scholar and historian who traveled to the United States in 1831 to observe certain aspects of American society and its political structure. Keep in mind that Tocqueville was writing in the 19th century, a time when only white men were truly free and equal in America. Therefore, the material that I present by him pertains to the white male citizen of his time. However, I use his concepts because I believe they transcend time and are still relevant as a basis for American society today as a whole. He was intrigued by the elements of the new form of democracy in America as well as the rising equality of social conditions and the importance of individualism to the American people (Tocqueville, Vol. 1, 95). Tocqueville was afraid that the values of equality, majority rule, and individualism would lead to the internal destruction of free institutions, and consequently, the freedom of people, which he believed was the basis for the survival of democracy.

Equality is the basis on which the United States is founded and on which our constitution and our laws are built. Michael Drolet, a 21st century scholar of Tocqueville's work, identified equality as Tocqueville's main observation of Americans in the 19th century:

> Equality of conditions was the 'nodal point' of democracy. . . . I soon realized that the influence of this fact extends far beyond the political mores and laws, exercising dominion over civil society as much as over the government; it creates opinions, gives birth to feelings, suggests customs, and modifies whatever it does not create: So the more I studied American society, the more clearly I saw equality of conditions as the creative element from which each particular fact derived, and all my observations constantly returned to this nodal point (Drolet, 62).

Tocqueville realized that equality was not only the central point for democratic government, but it was also imperative to the preservation of a democratic society of free people.

Equality was the key ingredient for democracy in the United States; however, it also created major threats to this democracy. Tocqueville identified individual isolation as the major threat to democracy, which caused each man to be politically and socially subject to the decisions of the majority which had the potential to advance into despotism and destroy freedom (Drolet, 90). Tocqueville worried that the same equality that motivated the desire for freedom would become so extreme that it would sever the social bonds among men and lead to administrative centralization and despotism. Equality had the potential power to destroy the liberty and freedom it created because if the human

desire for equality outweighed the desire for freedom, then liberty would have to be completely subjugated for any organization of society to take place. Societies could not survive if men are completely free, because absolute equality and freedom, lacking an authority figure, would produce chaos. "Men cannot become absolutely equal unless they are entirely free; and consequently equality, pushed to its furthest extent, may be confounded with freedom" (Tocqueville, Vol. 2, 95).

For Tocqueville, equal social conditions allowed humans to isolate one another from their fellows, in effect decreasing social cohesion among people. He warned that, "equality contains the risk of weakening the social bond; the individual, released from traditional communities exists only in himself and for himself alone" (Tocqueville, Vol. 2, 98). In egalitarian conditions, men pride themselves on being self-reliant, able to stand alone. Since they neither owe anything, nor expect anything from anyone, "they are apt to imagine that their whole destiny is in their own hands" (Tocqueville, Vol. 2, 99). Therefore, equality opened the door to American individualism, and Tocqueville believed this would poison communities and social solidarity. Tocqueville realized that equal conditions would promote competition, in turn isolating people as they worked solely for their own betterment.

According to Tocqueville, individualism is an isolating force that causes people to seek more private lives, dependent on themselves alone. Individualism had the potential to destroy public supports from the inside out. He writes:

> Individualism is a mature and calm feeling, which disposes each member
>
> of the community to sever himself from the mass of his fellows and to
>
> draw apart with his family and his friends, so that after he has thus formed

a little circle of his own, he willingly leaves society at large to itself. . . at

first, it only saps the virtues of public life, but in the long run it attacks and

destroys all others and is at length absorbed in downright selfishness

(Tocqueville, Vol. 2, 98).

Individualism is, to this day, a value that Americans hold dearly, because it allows people

the freedom to express their uniqueness; however, some present evidence points to the

fulfillment of Tocqueville's prediction of freedom and individualism as isolating forces.

In America, individualism is emphasized because it allows for innovation and new ideas,

an independent expression of self. American culture has always valued freedom of

expression and creativity of ideas within limits, because these ideals help our society to

evolve prosperously in an ever changing world. Self-reliance and self-expression create

an adaptability that is necessary to survive, and maintain our high standard of living and

status as a world superpower.

The emphasis on self, which individuality implies, is the dangerous element of the

equation. Advancement and ability to evolve are important for a society, but an emphasis

on self may motivate people to compete with and use one another for their own personal

advancement. They lose sight of the real effort which is advancement of society as a

whole. The selfish motive of American society is that a community should work for the

good of an individual, rather than the individual working for the good of the community.

Americans exploit the benefits of community for our own selfish gain. Rather than a

humble contribution to the community, we contribute with the expectation of something

in return. Tocqueville predicted that as the political sphere of the public grew, private

interactions would diminish, and people would form only small, segregated cliques in

order to indulge themselves in the enjoyments of private life, instead of living together in a common way (Tocqueville, Vol. 2, 215). "Among democratic nations…the interest of man is confined to those in close propinquity to himself" (Tocqueville, Vol. 2, 99).

Self-reliance also births other dangers: competition and material gratification. Tocqueville writes,

> …equality, which brings great benefits into the world, nevertheless suggests to men some very dangerous propensities. It tends to isolate them from one another; to concentrate every man's attention upon himself; and it lays open the soul to an inordinate love of material gratification (Tocqueville, Vol. 2, 22).

The love of money and material gratification appealed to the American commercial spirit. This greed played to American self interest and had the power to pit one person against another in competition for riches. Although competition is good for balancing a capitalist economy in democracy, Tocqueville worried that it had a destructive propensity when it was ruled by greed.

Equality in a democracy facilitates an environment of competition between people, and motivates the strong American ideal of success. Tocqueville observed that many Americans defined success as material satisfaction and wealth. He found that, "the effort to satisfy even the least wants of the body and to provide the little conveniences of life is uppermost in every mind" (Tocqueville, Vol. 2, 128). Tocqueville was startled by the American eagerness in seeking the quest for wealth; he thought that, "greed was most destructive to liberty because it drew individuals away from their civic duties; it enticed them away from political life" (Drolet, 94). Tocqueville was a scholar of Montesquieu

and he must have observed this threat with Montesquieu in mind, because it was Montesquieu who argued the dangerous effects of material wealth on communities: "the pursuit of wealth and material comforts undermined the bonds of community and created a condition whereby 'traffic in all human activities and moral virtues, the smallest things, those required by humanity, are done or given for money'" (Drolet, 85).

Tocqueville's problem with material wants in the United States was that it created an atmosphere where satisfaction could never be reached, nothing was ever enough, and the competition was ever increasing. "A native of the United States clings to this world's goods as if he were certain never to die; and he is so hasty in grasping at all within his reach that one would suppose he was constantly afraid of not living long enough to enjoy them" (Tocqueville, Vol. 2, 136). In the freest, most prosperous nation in the world he found that people were very serious and seemed sad, even among all their worldly treasures. He said that it seemed as if "a cloud habitually hung upon their brow" (Tocqueville, Vol. 2, 136).

This state of discontent was not only confined to material wealth, but also to the conditions of equality and freedom themselves. "Among democratic nations, men easily attain a certain equality of condition, but they can never attain as much as they desire," and because of this, competition is advanced by the personal pride of individuals seeking to rise above, and in turn create an inequality for their own advantage (Tocqueville, Vol. 2, 216). As the proportion of equality becomes more complete, the desire for equality becomes more insatiable (Tocqueville, Vol. 2, 138).

The competition and intense individualistic culture of the United States contributes to a segregation of ideas, and traditions that sever social and generational ties. Tocqueville thought that this was the philosophical method of the Americans:

> To evade the bondage of system and habit, of family maxims, class opinions, and, in some degree, of national prejudices; to accept tradition only as a means of information, and existing facts only on a lesson to be used in doing otherwise and doing better; to seek the reason for things for oneself, and in oneself alone; to tend to results without being bound to means, and to strike through the form to the substance (Tocqueville, Vol. 2, 3).

According to this philosophy, Americans were living in a broken state, with no lasting traditions or common ideas. This broken state was produced by a lack of substantial traditions continuing through different generations that connect people through time. No common ideas equate to an absence of common action, and therefore, although there are still people, there is no social body (Tocqueville, Vol. 2, 8).

> Thus not only does democracy make every man forget his ancestors, but it hides his descendants and separates his contemporaries from him; it throws him back forever upon himself alone and threatens in the end to confine him entirely within the solitude of his own heart (Tocqueville, Vol. 2, 99).

Herein lies the problem, because in order for a society to exist and prosper, it must be held together by certain predominant ideas and opinions from a common source of belief that is previously formed (Tocqueville, Vol. 2, 8).

At periods of equality men have no faith in one another, by reason of their

common resemblance; but this very resemblance gives them almost

unbounded confidence in the judgment of the public; for it would seem

probable that, as they are all endowed with equal means of judging, the

greater truth should go with the greater number (Tocqueville, Vol. 2, 10).

Tocqueville's fear was that the same equality that was able to render men independent of

one another, made each man alone susceptible to the influence of the majority, he called

it the omnipotence of the majority (Tocqueville, Vol. 2, 10).

He examined all of the facts of the omnipotence of majority rule, including both

its effects on the law and its ramifications on individuals' thoughts and ideas; he

characterized it as an internal element of democracy (Drolet, 87). To Tocqueville the

omnipotence of the majority was a dangerous and powerful element of democracy,

because it undermined citizens' independence of mind and true freedom of discussion

(Drolet, 90). Without common ideals passed down through generations, and kept by a

central authority, a nation should end up in chaotic anarchy, but for Tocqueville,

democratic nations in particular were more susceptible to this possibility of

administrative despotism (Drolet, 89). He defined administrative despotism as "a kind of

orderly, gentle, peaceful slavery which…has a possibility of getting itself established

even under the shadow of sovereignty of the people" (Tocqueville, Vol. 2, 319). So in a

democratic system a principle authority is necessary although it is confined to a specific

place, because the "independence of individual minds…cannot be unbounded"

(Tocqueville, Vol. 2, 9). He agreed that political centralization was required for

civilization, but he also realized that in excess it eroded local and individual liberties, and ultimately would destroy political virtues by eroding public morality (Drolet, 65).

"Every man allows himself to be put in the leading-strings, because he sees that it is not a person or a class of persons, but the people at large who hold the end of his chain (Tocqueville, Vol. 2, 319). Since the citizens of a democracy equated their self-interest with material comforts, they would come to find civic obligations as "irritating intrusions into what is really important in their lives; acquiring wealth and possessions" (Drolet, 85). The repercussions of this were that by neglecting their civic duties, citizens were giving more power to their representatives and the state to act with greater impunity.

For Tocqueville, democratic despotism threatened freedom, because the same vices that it produced were exactly the same ones that equality fostered. "Despotism sees in the separation among men the surest guarantee of continuance....no vice of the human heart is so acceptable to it as selfishness" (Tocqueville, Vol. 2, 102). This was why despotism would thrive in a democracy of equal conditions. In pursuing happiness and success, people would withdraw into the private sphere and abandon their duty and right to the exercise of political power.

<div align="center">Habits of the Heart: Understanding the Self</div>

In 1985, Robert N. Bellah and his team of researchers published their findings about cultural, sociological and psychological characteristics of American life. Over a five year period in the early 1980s Bellah, Richard Madsen, William Sullivan, Ann Swidler, and Steven Tipton observed communities and interviewed individuals in different middle-class American communities. The focus of Bellah's team was to discover the character of American life, how Americans perceive themselves and their

society, and how they relate their thoughts to action (Bellah, vii). They were particularly interested in the American individualism that Tocqueville described and its influence on the nature of public and private life. Each researcher focused on a form of either public or private life in the United States in order to find how Americans understand themselves individually and as part of a larger society, and what effects this had on American culture and political structure.

> We believe that one of the keys to the survival of free institutions is the relationship between private and public life, the way in which citizens do, or do not, participate in the public sphere. We therefore decide to concentrate our research on how private and public life work in the United States: the extent to which private life either prepares people to take part in the public world or encourages them to find meaning exclusively in the private sphere, and the degree to which public life fulfills our private aspirations or discourages us so much that we withdraw from involvement in it (Bellah, Preface VII).

Tocqueville used the term "habits of the heart" to describe the mores that formed the American character. Bellah uses this term as the title of his book that looks at the modern day consequences of Tocqueville's predictions about American character and lifestyle.

Bellah identifies three central traditions in American life: freedom, justice, and success. Freedom is the most resonant and deeply held American value; the fight for independence to achieve equality is central throughout American history (Bellah, 23). However, our understanding of freedom ends up meaning freedom from others and freedom of obligations. "Freedom turns out to mean being left alone by others, not having

other people's values, ideas, or styles of life forced upon one, being free of arbitrary authority in work, family, and political life" (Bellah, 23). The problem with this understanding of freedom is that it lacks a way for Americans to "easily address common conceptions of the ends of a good life or ways to coordinate cooperative action with others" (Bellah, 24). Instead of delivering autonomy, this conception of independence and freedom instead achieve loneliness and vulnerability (Bellah, 246).

American traditions of fairness encourage us to believe that there should be equal opportunity for everyone, in order to pursue whatever it is that each person understands to be happiness (Bellah, 25). This perception of fairness does not provide a clear picture of what equal distribution of opportunity would truly look like. With the extent of occupational competition in today's job market, equal opportunity does not assure a just outcome in distribution. The American traditions of fairness and justice of opportunity emphasize procedural justice, but lack sources for thinking about distributive justice--an appropriate sharing of economic resources--which must be based on conceptions of a substantively just society (Bellah, 26). The problem with this is that it is unrealistic, it is impossible to guarantee an equal outcome of justice even if we have equal opportunity.

In *Habits of the Heart,* Bellah and his team identify two ways of perceiving success on a personal level, utilitarian individualism and expressive individualism. Utilitarian individualism is the idea that "in a society where each rigorously pursued his own interest, the social good would automatically emerge" (Bellah, 27). For many Americans, the idea of success is related primarily to work, by climbing the corporate ladder and helping the corporation profit, one could achieve success. Middle class America holds the view that through work one gains self-respect and control, at least in

part, of one's environment (Bellah, 204). The problems that utilitarian individualism created, in terms of success, were countered by the development of the idea of expressive individualism. A life devoted to the constant pursuit of one's own material interests leaves little room for the cultivation of love, human feeling and a deeper expression of self.

Expressive individualism values a life of strong feeling and deep understanding of the self rather than material wealth for success (Bellah, 27). For many artists and writers, American independence was, and still is, valued for the freedom to "express oneself and explore its vast social and cosmic identities" (Bellah, 27). The social expression of self contributes both to the self and the larger community, for if one's only role in community is through a specialized professional skill, then one gets lonely (Bellah, 180). For the same reason that occupational success is undermined as a life goal, private life is deprived of meaning when the purpose of involvement with others is solely for individual satisfaction (Bellah, 14). This is why it is important for us to explore the relationship between economic success in our highly bureaucratized society, and the goals of success in public and private life (Bellah, 22).

During their interviewing process, Bellah and his team recognized the same need for balance between individualism and community commitment that Tocqueville had observed over a century earlier. "The processes of separation and individuation were necessary to free us from the tyrannical structures of the past; but they must be balanced by renewal of the commitment to community if they are not to end in self-destruction or turn into their own opposites" (Bellah, 277). Bellah and his team found a prominent use of the language of individualism and self-understanding while doing their interviews; and

they realized that modern individualism seems to be molding an isolating way of life that is neither individually nor socially viable (Bellah, 144). Tocqueville's fears, from the 19th century, seem to be confirmed by Bellah, in the 1980s, in his findings of the prominence of the individualistic ideal, for when individuation is more important than community, "people are not together enough to take on the responsibilities of authority" (Bellah, 240).

Bellah suggests that American cultural traditions define personality, achievement and the purpose of human life in ways that leave the individual suspended in glorious, but terrifying isolation (Bellah, 6). This hypothesis corroborates Tocqueville's inference that American traditions have the potential to force "each back on himself alone, and there is the danger that he many be shut up in the solitude of his own heart" (Bellah, 37). Even President Reagan affirmed this way of thinking in the 1980 election when he defined his mission as, "a new consensus with all those across the land who share a community of values embedded in these words: family, work, neighborhood, peace and freedom," all of which evoke private, rather than public virtues (Bellah, 263).

Bellah uses the term "lifestyle enclaves" to describe elements of private life in contrast to the term "community" for public life. The word "lifestyle" is most closely related to leisure and consumption, and is usually unrelated to work (Bellah, 72). Lifestyle brings those people together that are alike socially, economically and culturally, and the aim of a lifestyle enclave is the enjoyment of being with people who share one's lifestyle (Bellah, 72). Lifestyle enclaves are exclusive, unlike lifestyle communities. Such enclaves are segmental in the sense that they concern only the private realm of each individual's life, and enclaves are socially segmental in that they only involve those who share a common lifestyle (Bellah, 72). "Whereas a community attempts to be an inclusive

whole, celebrating the interdependence of public and private life and of the different callings of all, lifestyle is fundamentally segmental, and celebrates the narcissism of similarity" (Bellah, 72).

A Robert Frost poem explores this theme of enclaves as it relates to family: "Home is the place where, when you have to go there, /they have to take you in" (Bellah, 114). The family, whose purpose was originally to facilitate the socializing of its members into the larger society, has become the core of the private sphere (Bellah, 111). Family is no longer an integral part of a larger moral ecology tying the individual to the community; it has become an impeding force whose aim is to avoid linking individuals to the public world as far as possible (Bellah, 111). Family members have become enmeshed, increasingly dependent on and protective of one another, in an attempt to protect other members of the family from the dangers of the outside world.

Bellah also explored a more modern aspect of private life through examining the increasingly popular therapeutic school of thought, and the ideas of self. "Therapeutic understandings fit many aspects of traditional American individualism, particularly the assumption that social bonds can be firm only if they rest on free, self-interested choices of individuals" (Bellah, 109). This school of thought emerged out of the concern for mental health in a world where one can count on fewer people for unconditional acceptance while at the same time must compete harder for our livelihood (Bellah, 120). The ideal of the therapeutic world is a world based on impersonal bureaucratic rules that guarantee free access to market choices and the opportunity for empathetic communication in open and intense interpersonal relations (Bellah, 133). The therapeutic outlook can make the impersonality of our increasingly bureaucratic, routine corporate

lives less painful, but it is still unable to eliminate the conflict of peoples' conceptions of themselves as their own ends and as means to organizational ends (Bellah, 125). This school of thought perpetuates the confusion between what is personal and what is not personal in the modern world.

The basis of therapeutic assumptions is relational. The relationship between the patient and professional is the chief instrument of the therapy (Bellah, 121). The therapeutic world constantly hopes for, but has trouble making sense of the idea of reciprocal support, because it is so focused on the idea of self-reliance that it does not comprehend sacrifice, which implies self-denial. In the therapeutic relationship, this is justified by a view of interpersonal relationships based on a contractual exchange (Bellah, 126). The therapeutic school of thought is a contradiction in itself, for "just as the notion of an absolutely free self led to an absolutely empty conception of self, complete psychological contractualism leads to the notion of an absolutely empty relationship" that cannot sustain rich, coherent selves or continuity in relationships (Bellah, 139). By its own logic, a solely contractual ethic leads to unstable commitments (Bellah, 130). These contradictions beg the question, has psychological sophistication been bought at the price of moral impoverishment (Bellah, 13)? These contradictions also further demonstrate the importance of the individual and the expense of community.

Bellah defines public life through civic interactions, politics, religion and work. He identifies three conceptions of politics involved in the meaning of citizenship: politics of community, politics of interest and politics of the nation. The politics of community is based on the central meaning of the word "democratic" in the United States, a moral consensus of community achieved by free face-to-face discussions (Bellah, 200). Politics

of community, a consensual community of autonomous individuals, is the political environment to which most Americans are comfortable relating (Bellah, 206).

The politics of interest is depicted through the pursuit of differing interests according to agreed-upon neutral rules (Bellah, 200). "Since there is no way to discuss or evaluate the relative merits of values and lifestyles in the culture of individualism, a generalized tolerance, dependent on strict adherence to procedural rules, is the best that can be expected" (Bellah, 203). This conception of politics of interest requires the organization of an administrative system. "Administrative centralization, based on a series of carefully planned expert solutions utilized in an atmosphere of tolerance bred of easy mobility is the best solution for everyone" (Bellah, 261). However, the ironic result of this is an increase in privatized attitudes, because the purpose of the government is to provide each person a means to their own private ends and material abundance (Bellah, 265).

"Republican government…could survive only if animated by a spirit of virtue and concern for the public good" (Bellah, 253). The politics of nations raises politics to the realm of statesmanship, where the affairs of national life transcend particular individual interests (Bellah, 200). Montesquieu was the first to recognize the necessity of civic virtue in a republican society. The identity of civic virtue is based on the acknowledgement of the relationship between one's own good and the common good, this being the mainspring for any self-regulating society (Bellah, 254). Our form of government depends on the existence of virtue among the people, and personifies the importance of an active role in citizenship. James Madison, Alexis de Tocqueville, and Eugene Debs all realized that "the survival of a free people depends on the revival of

public virtue that is able to find political expression" (Bellah, 271). Although Americans are most comfortable relating themselves to the politics of community, realistically we have adopted the form of politics of interest. But for the survival of our current system, we need to embrace the politics of nation. If we were truly living under a conception of the politics of nation, individuals would put the common good first and serve in active communities. People would realize, and take part in, the "true meaning of democracy" and take real action as citizens to ensure not only their personal prosperity, but the prosperity and solidarity of their community and nation. This type of system would theoretically provide more understanding and consequently more peace among people and nations, and create a more harmonious world.

Bellah explored the notions of public life through the identity of people as citizens, observing their attitudes toward work, religion, and community to gather an idea of people's perceptions of their public interactions and secondary relationships. Many American values are deeply rooted in Biblical traditions. However, today different Christian sects have separated their members from other sects and from their attachments to the wider society in an effort to draw together those with similar beliefs into a special religious community. In this way, morality becomes personal, not social; and private instead of public (Bellah, 231). But religion still makes a great contribution to public life through its emphasis on the idea that individuality and society are not opposites but require each other (Bellah, 246).

In the past century, there has been a shift in people's comprehension of the meaning of work in their lives. Before industrialization, most people understood work as an aspect of expressive individualism. Work was perceived as a calling used to connect

individual contributions of specialized skill to the greater society. Today, in our highly

post-industrial, mechanized world, the motivation for work has transitioned from a

personal calling to a career, an avenue to success and material wealth for many people.

The bureaucratic, corporate world that most people partake in everyday becomes

dehumanizing in that one's individual self-expression must usually be sacrificed for the

organization's "bottom-line goals" (Bellah, 120). Work has been transformed from a

means of understanding and expressing oneself to a means to an end of utilitarian

efficiency and economic success. The citizen has been swallowed up by the "economic

man" (Bellah, 270).

Bellah and his team were able to highlight the symptoms of America's social

disunity by identifying the root causes of the segregation in American's public and

private lives. What has failed at every level is the integration of these two aspects of our

way of life. "We have committed what to the republican founders of our nation was the

cardinal sin: we have put our own good, as individuals, as groups, as a nation, ahead of

the common good" (Bellah, 285). We have developed a culture of separation ruled by

personal ambition and consumerism, which are motivated by one of our most basic

historical ideals, the American dream (Bellah, 279). Since the American dream is

something that we have so deeply believed in for so long, and worked so hard toward

achieving, we find it difficult to let go of even when it contradicts another dream that we

have--that of living in a society that would really be worth living in (Bellah, 286).

Bellah concludes that America in the 1980s was suffering from an internal

incoherence. Our efforts and achievements for freedom, wealth and power have been

enormous and allow us the aspiration to become a genuinely humane society in a decent

world. However, we seem to be on the brink of disaster, not only from international conflict, "but from internal incoherence of our own society" (Bellah, 284). However, Bellah's team was confident that the split between private and public life may begin to be mended if we could lessen our concern for advancement and weaken our motive to keep the complexity of our society invisible.

If we could work to become aware of our intricate connectedness and interdependence, then we may begin to make moral sense of the cultural differences among ourselves and bridge the gaps of community life and lifestyle enclaves (Bellah, 288). We must communicate and reconnect, for "well-connected people live longer, healthier lives" (Bellah, 135). Communication is critical because open communication allows for the ability to collectively think problems out in order to solve issues (Bellah, 7). American's must become aware of their "social ecology," that they are deeply interrelated to their society and that each person's actions have enormous ramifications for the lives of others (Bellah, 284).

> It's important to realize that other people have other values, and they are to be respected. That is what freedom is all about; it concerns mutual respect among its members; and presupposes that respect for the dignity of others and concern for the welfare of society as a whole are more important than selfish interests (Bellah, 192).

By getting involved in our communities we can discover ways of understanding the world that will overcome this sharp distinction between the self and the other. Through sharing the practices of commitment that are rooted in religious and civic involvement, we can identify with those different from ourselves and begin to realize that they are not

only joined with us by interdependence and a common destiny, but also by common ends (Bellah, 252).

Robert D. Putnam: Social Capital and Civic Disengagement

Robert D. Putnam, a Professor of Public Policy at Harvard, examines the past and present trends of civic and social character in America in his book *Bowling Alone*. He frames his arguments and concerns about the changes in American society through the concept of "social capital." Putnam defines "social capital" through the analogy of the definitions of human and physical capital- "tools and training that enhance individual productivity" (Putnam, 18). His core idea of social capital is based on the premise that social networks have value and social contacts affect the productivity of individuals and groups, just as physical objects and properties of individuals affect physical and human capital (Putnam, 19).

Social capital is related to civic virtue; social capital refers to the connections between individual's social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trust that evolve from them (Putnam, 19). "Social networking focuses on how the structures of ties affect individuals and their relationships" (Wikipedia). The shape of a social network determines its usefulness to the individual. Social capital can also be divided into the aspects of public and private life, and can serve the good of both (Putnam, 20).

The idea of social capital advocates that a sense of belonging and concrete experience through social networks can bring great benefits to people (Putnam, 20). "A society characterized by generalized reciprocity is more efficient than a distrustful society… and trustworthiness lubricates social life" (Putnam, 21). Interaction among diversity allows people to build communities that commit them to one another, and this

tends to produce a norm of generalized reciprocity (Putnam, 21). Through civic

engagement and social capital we can achieve a mutual obligation that accepts

responsibility for action (Putnam, 21).

Although Americans have become more tolerant over the years, Putnam indicates

that we are less socially connected to one another in all parts of society compared to three

or four decades ago (Putnam, 352). Putnam is mainly concerned with the changes that

have occurred in civic life and personal connections, in the past fifty years, and what

these changes mean for the future of American community. He illuminates these issues

by examining peoples' engagement with one another through informal social connections

and formal organizations. Putnam examines informal social connections through more

casual interactions characterized by family and friend relationships. Informal connections

may not build civic skills in the same way that involvement in a club, political group, a

union or a church can; however, informal connections are very important in sustaining

social networks (Putnam, 95). "Experimental social psychologists have uncovered

striking evidence that even the most casual social interactions can have a powerful effect

on reciprocity" (Putnam, 94). Each personal social interaction, no matter how small is an

investment in social capital.

Americans have shifted the way they divide their time among social interactions.

They have shifted inward toward their private and home lives of self and family, and

have secluded themselves from public life and the wider community (Putnam, 107).

Today's social connections are characterized more by bonding (exclusive interaction)

than bridging (inclusive interaction) relationships (Putnam, 22). One interesting example

of this change from the public to private sphere is the interconnectedness of families in

the 21st century. Even though people have become more isolated, families are more

interconnected and enmeshed than before, the consequence being that children lack

knowledgeable independent judgment, and are tremendously dependent on their parents.

Even Americans who live alone are spending more time at home, the era of

Cheers dissipated (Putnam, 101). People who live alone are especially affected by this

retreat into the home. A person who lives alone may go an entire day, even multiple days

without ever encountering an intimate human interaction. For example, they wake up in

their home alone, get into their car and drive to work alone, sit in their cubicle, walled in

from others and talking to people mainly through a computer screen or telephone, then

get back into their car alone, and arrive at home to spend the night alone in front of the

television. This single person's average day did not consist of a single human touch or

face-to-face intimate interaction. Public supports and informal social interactions would

normally provide a substitution for this lack of intimate human interaction, but as people

move into the private realm we lose the value of the public realm. This is a lonely life to

live.

> We spend less time in conversation over meals, we exchange visits less
>
> often, we engage less often in leisure activities that encourage casual
>
> social interaction, we spend more time watching and less time doing. We
>
> know our neighbors less well, and we see old friends less often (Putnam,
>
> 115).

Statistics show that business in full service restaurants declined by one-fourth from 1970

to 1998, while fast food places doubled (Putnam, 102). These facts refute the justification

that entertainment of friends and neighbors has simply moved interactions outside the

home; and it confirms that the practice of entertaining friends seems to be vanishing entirely (Putnam, 100). This backs the assertion that Americans are connecting with one another less and less every year (Putnam, 98). So, according to Putnam, informal social connections have not only shifted into a more private setting, but have also generally declined in number.

Most of Putnam's research demonstrates the shift away from public life by examining changes in the participation of civic and religious organizations and political involvement. A decline in political participation can obviously be noted in both local and national politics over the last forty years. "Voting is by a substantial margin the most common form of political activity, and it embodies the most fundamental democratic principle of equality;" and voting in presidential elections has declined by roughly a quarter, from 62.8% in 1960 to 48.9% in 1996 (Putnam, 31). Explanations for this decline include a growing distrust of the government, declining party mobilization, fraying social bonds and political realignment, virtually all of which are due to generational change (Putnam, 33).

Electoral participation is simply the most visible aspect of engagement in the political community, but the decline in voting is only one symptom of disengagement from the community. Political knowledge and an interest in public affairs is a critical precondition for more active involvement in the political community (Putnam, 35). The post-baby boom generations are generally less knowledgeable about public affairs, and pay less attention to the news and current events than their elders, despite the wide proliferation of accessibility to information today (Putnam, 36). Since voting and

following politics are somewhat undemanding forms of political participation and not forms of social capital, we must examine more personal forms of political engagement.

Trends in political civic engagement that involve social capital include attending public meetings, serving as an officer in a club or organization, serving on a committee, and even signing petitions and writing letters to newspapers and writing to Congressmen (Putnam, 41). A Roper poll found that the frequency of every form of community involvement, from the most common, petitions signing, to the least common, running for office, declined significantly over the period of 1973 to 1994. People today feel less politically effective, and so they remain relatively well-informed spectators that simply do not partake in the game (Putnam, 46). The consequence of this lack of participation is that we lose the point of the whole concept of politics as democratic deliberation (Putnam, 40).

Religious involvement is a crucial dimension of civic engagement; trends in civic engagement are closely related to patterns of religious involvement (Putnam, 69). Faith communities in the United States are the single most important repository of social capital; half of all associational memberships in the U.S. are church related (Putnam, 66). Churches provide an incubator for civic skills and norms, as well as community interests. Churchgoers are substantially more likely to be involved in secular organizations and have deeper informal social connections than non-churchgoers (Putnam, 66). The connectedness harbored in church communities is partly responsible for the beneficence of church people, rather than merely faith alone (Putnam, 67). However, religious participation has declined in the past three to four decades.

Americans have become 10% less likely to claim church membership and actual attendance and involvement with religious activities has fallen by roughly 25-50% (Putnam, 72). During the 1980s, many people became disillusioned by institutionalized religion, and since then we have seen an increasing pattern toward more privatized religion.

> Some joined new religious movements, others sought personal enlightenment through various spiritual therapies and disciplines, but most simply 'dropped out' of organized religion altogether…the consequence was a tendency toward highly individualized religious psychology without the benefits of strong supportive attachments to believing communities (Putnam, 73).

These trends reinforce, rather than counter balance, the ominous plunge of social connectedness in the secular community.

One facet of social capital that is regarded as useful to measuring community involvement is official membership in formal organizations (Putnam, 49). At first glance, many records show impressive increases in the number of voluntary associations that have been created in the past three decades; national organizations per capita have increased by two-thirds during this period (Putnam, 49). Although there are more groups, they tend to be less viable sources of social capital. Putnam calls these "tertiary associations" because they lack local chapters and meetings where the members meet and interact face-to-face; instead they are usually characterized by mail-order memberships (Putnam, 52). These tertiary groups serve more of a political purpose than one of companionship or enjoyment. The members do not connect at a grass roots level, but

concentrate on expressing policy views in the national political realm (Putnam, 51). Though these mass membership organizations are growing in political importance, they are an unreliable guide for measuring the vitality of social connectedness through civic and community engagement (Putnam, 52). In Michigan National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) studies between 1957 and 1976, researchers found that informal socializing with friends and relatives declined by about 10%, organizational memberships fell by 16% and church attendance was reduced by 20% (Putnam, 58). These surveys' evidence corroborates the organizational records that show that "membership in voluntary associations among ordinary Americans declined modestly between the mid 1950s and the 1970s," and these figures spiked even more dramatically in the 1980s and 90s (Putnam, 58).

> Perhaps a more subtle shift has occurred between residence based and work-based networks, a shift from locational communities to vocational communities. Since more of us are working outside the home today than a generation ago, perhaps we have simply transferred more of our friendships, more of our civic discussions and more of our community ties from the front porch to the water cooler (Putnam, 85).

This shift began during the Industrial Revolution when place or work and residence became more segregated, and more time was spent in factories and offices away from home (Putnam, 86). The end of the 20th century was marked by a larger labor force than ever before in America; the labor force increased from 59% in 1950 to 67% in 1997 (Putnam, 86).

This increase in the labor force combined with more people working outside their homes has created a setting where "work is where the hearth is for many solitary souls" (Putnam, 86). The workplace is more diverse than other social settings both racially and politically, and the majority of people spend most of their time with these coworkers (Putnam, 87). Both professional and blue collar workers put in long hours together; they eat together, travel together, arrive early and stay late together (Putnam, 86). Over the past few decades work has gradually become a less one-dimensional activity. Today work encompasses more of the activities and concerns of both public (social and political) and private (family) life than ever before (Putnam, 86). This increased interaction with coworkers creates norms of mutual help and reciprocity in the workplace (Putnam, 87).

Unfortunately there is no evidence that socializing, beyond basic interaction, in the workplace has actually increased. Workplace ties tend to continue to be casual and enjoyable, but not deeply supportive. Coworkers account for less than 10% of our friends (Putnam, 88). Work-based networks are often used for instrumental purposes, rather than social or community purposes. "Work" entails time and effort for employers that serve primarily material, not social, ends. "My own view is that any solution to the problem of civic disengagement in contemporary America must include better integration between our work lives and our community and social lives" (Putnam, 91).

Contemporary American Life: Isolation and Privacy

What is happening to community today, and why? We now understand American historical cultural traditions and social values, as well as some evidence of their

implications on life in the United States today. Critical writings have, in recent years, documented a decline in civil life, but what does this mean for us today, and why is this happening now, two hundred years after Tocqueville's predictions? Some writers feel that the message we keep hearing, a message of deep concern, is that the American Dream just does not seem to be coming true for many Americans, but perhaps the real issue is that the American Dream is not what we thought it was (Duany, XII).

Putnam, Bellah, and many others have demonstrated a clear decline in civic engagement and social involvement among Americans over the past four decades. "Society seems to be evolving in an unhealthy way. Americans are splintering into insular factions, each pursuing an increasingly narrow agenda, without much thought for the greater good" (Duany, 59). According to M.P. Baumgartner, we have developed "a culture of atomized isolation, self-restraint, and moral minimalism" (Putnam, 210). So what agency is guilty of robbing our society of its community and destroying social capital?

I would argue that there are multiple culprits, each fueled by American traditional values of individualism and equality and advanced by modernity. Many peoples' initial response to questions about civic disengagement is "I don't have time" or "I'm too busy" or "I don't have the money right now." However, I do not believe these excuses to be the real reason for the decline in civic engagement. Although many people may feel that they have less time and money to contribute, their lack of time and money does not seem to answer the core of the question, because evidence shows the contrary. In the last three decades, Americans have seen no general decrease in free time; on the contrary there seems to have been a significant net increase in leisure time over these years (Putnam,

190). This makes sense considering the rapid development of labor-saving technology during this time. We may feel that we never have money to spare, but the evidence shows that this cannot coincide with declines in civic engagement because the decline appeared before the economic troubles of the 1970s and continued steadily during the booms of the 1980s and late 90s (Putnam, 193). The economy soared and fell, but social capital only went down. It seems the only change in time and money was the way we spent them. "More and more of our time and money are spent on goods and services consumed individually, rather than those consumed collectively" (Putnam, 245).

Technology: TV, Computers, and Cell Phone Usage

In recent decades, incredible strides have been made through technological advances. There has been an ongoing debate about the consequences of these new technologies, including debate about technology's affect on our cultural and social interactions, as well as its affect on the environment. At the heart of this debate are two political strains: the appeals of Communitarians and Libertarianism (Wise, 157). The Communitarian movement, which is traceable back to Alexis de Tocqueville and Robert Bellah, preaches a balance of individual rights and community responsibility (Wise, 153). "At the heart of Communitarianism is a return to a moral standard and center for society" (Wise, 153). Libertarians on the other hand are portrayed as corporate apologists. Theirs is an anti-governmental, deregulatory stance that advocates not only the personal rights of life, liberty and pursuit of happiness, but also the corporate rights based on the laws of the free market (Wise, 155). These two political viewpoints underlie many of the arguments that I am presenting.

Technology and the recent advances in wireless communication help to reduce uncertainty in many areas of human life. They allow for people to more readily keep in touch, for greater information flow, better allocation of resources (including time), more personal safety and reduced fear, better parent-child connections and important medical interventions (Katz, 11). However, along with all the benefits of these advances comes a host of unintended consequences. Technology is marketed as the great equalizer, but there is little evidence to support this. The wireless technology of the Internet has important consequences for various areas from personal happiness to social equity, and from economic success to personal safety (Katz, 42).

Has a higher standard of living somehow failed to produce a better quality of life for Americans? It seems that our economic and technological progress has not succeeded in improving our society.

> Without derogating our modern technological achievements we now see
> that they have had devastatingly destructive consequences for social
> ecology…modernity has given us a capacity for destructiveness on a scale
> incomparably greater than in previous centuries…It is also damaged by
> the destruction of the subtle ties that bind human beings to one another,
> leaving them frightened and alone (Bellah, 284).

People seem to be drawing away from public life into the shelter of their private homes where their main interactions with the outside come from television and computer screens (Duany, 59). This is why technological interconnectedness can hardly serve to promote a productive social revolution. Many worry that the most dangerous technologies are those that weave themselves so deeply into our everyday lives that they become

indistinguishable from ourselves (Wise, 120). The most obvious example of this throughout recent decades is the television; however, today wireless Internet and phone services rival televisions record of dispersion.

Throughout the 20th century, television entertainment has affected our leisure time more profoundly than any other factor in history (Putnam, 221). Barely 10% of American households owned television sets in the 1950s, compared with 90% in 1959 (Putnam, 221). This is probably the most rapid diffusion ever of a technological innovation, rivaled only by the spread of the Internet today. Then the 1980s ushered in the rapid diffusion of videocassettes and video games adding yet other forms of "screen time" (Putnam, 223). Electronic devices spread through all levels of American society at a rate 5-10 times quicker than other devices that are now nearly as ubiquitous (Putnam, 217).

The TV has served as the center of family life for the past three decades. It was originally marketed as an agent for "bringing families together," as demonstrated by programs such as "Leave it To Beaver" and "Father Knows Best." However, the TV centered family consequently turned inward, away from the fears and dangers that lurked beyond the four walls of the house. At the same time, the TV is the family's key connection with the outside world, and the outside world becomes an abstraction filtered through the TV (Putnam, 224). This phenomenon constructs the house as a barrier to the outside, no longer connecting people to the public, but rather sealing them off from it (Putnam, 224). In recent years, we have shifted our extra leisure time toward home based activities, mainly TV watching, and away from outside socialization (Putnam, 238). "Between 1965 and 1995 we gained an average of six hours per week in leisure time," and we spent almost all of those extra hours watching TV (Putnam, 222).

Not only is TV a significant factor in civic disengagement, it is the single most consistent predictor of disengagement in general found by researchers (Putnam, 230). It is the only leisure activity that inhibits participation in other leisure activities, for as Putnam found, participation in some activities is usually an indicator of participation in other activities (Putnam, 237). "The single most important consequence of the television revolution has been to bring us home" (Putnam, 223).

TV's isolating effects are not a new phenomenon. Early on in the television age, T.S. Eliot observed, "it is a medium of entertainment which permits millions of people to listen to the same joke at the same time, and yet remain lonesome" (Putnam, 217). Television has astounding affects, including increased isolation of individuals, not only from the outside world, but also from one another. This is especially true today, as most households own more than one television, and even watching television together becomes rarer. The fraction of sixth grade children with TV sets in their personal rooms grew from 6% in 1970 to 77% in 1999 (Putnam, 223). Television has now confined us further than just the four walls of a house; it now confines us each to the four walls of our own bedrooms.

The detrimental effects of television viewing reach far beyond simply social isolation. TV watching comes at the expense of nearly every social activity outside the home (Putnam, 237). The major casualties of TV watching are religious participation, social visiting, shopping, parties, sports, and organizational participation (Putnam, 237). It is associated with less social communication of all forms including written (letters and greeting cards), oral (phone calls) and electronic (emails) (Putnam, 231). Dependence on television entertainment is also correlated with a wide range of physical and

psychological ills, including headaches, indigestion, and sleeplessness (Putnam, 240). TV watching helps children to gain weight because metabolic rates appear to plunge while children watch (Putnam, 240). It steals time and encourages lethargy and passivity (Putnam, 239). It also increases aggressiveness, which probably reduces academic achievement, and is statistically connected to "psychosocial malfunctioning" (Putnam, 236). It is the only positively correlated leisure activity to increased financial anxiety (Putnam, 193). Another probable effect of TV, due to the heavy volume of commercial advertising, is its encouragement of materialistic values.

In addition, television watching is associated with civic ignorance, cynicism and lessened political involvement (Putnam, 236). Political communications specialist Roderick Hart argues that television creates a false sense of companionship between viewers and actors (Putnam, 242). This makes people feel intimate and informed, as well as busy and important. The result of this is what he calls "remote-control politics," viewers feel engaged with the community without the effort of actually being engaged (Putnam, 242). Political scientist Shanto Iyengar found similar experimental results. He found that prevailing TV coverage of social problems, such as poverty, leads viewers to attribute those problems to individual rather than societal failings, therefore justifying their own lack of responsibility for helping solve the problem (Putnam, 242). So even those who claim that they watch TV news in order to be politically knowledgeable still become less likely to contribute to solutions.

During the 1990s, personal computers and Internet access dramatically broadened the types of information and entertainment of the American home (Putnam, 223). The modern technologies of nuclear systems and industrial technology have recently been

replaced by the postmodern technologies of communications and information (Wise, 83).

The effects of these technological advances are that news and entertainment have become

increasingly individualized since people can now listen and watch whatever, whenever

and wherever they want. "Electronic technology allows us to consume hand tailored

entertainment in private, even utterly alone" (Putnam, 217).

Promoters of the Internet appeal to its general sense of community. Technologies

serve society's goals of personal growth and fulfillment through person-to-person

communication. However, the Internet community turns out to be a community of people

who consider themselves "rugged individualists, the lone pioneers connected across a

wire" (Wise, 157). The Internet community is a community of interests, not of people. It

is yet another example of technological escapism, substituting virtual reality for reality

(Wise, 154). A community based on special interests supports a consumerist-centered

organization rather than one of community based interests (Wise, 154). This becomes an

environment where the dominant communities are centered on leisure activities and

hobbies, making political and community concerns less central (Wise, 154). The

technological revolution has "lightened our souls and enlightened our minds," but it has

also rendered our leisure more private and passive (Putnam, 254).

The electronic society does not define individuals; it has no goals or objectives for

private identity (McLuhan, 98). With the rise of the technological era humans lose their

innocence and their identity, both in private and in society. Traditional social structures

such as family and the church break up and disintegrate in this techno-industrial society

(Slack, 45). "We are entering the age of implosion after 3000 years of explosions. The

electronic field of simultaneity gets everybody involved with everyone else," while at the

same time the computer screen dissolves our human image (McLuhan, 94). Live encounters provide stronger deeper relationships than do encounters passed through technology, but live encounters are becoming rarer in the 21st century (Putnam 242). We have seen a rise of the "motorized handicapped," technology that allows people to be able to control their environment without physical displacement (Wise, 129). Individuals have lost their natural mobility and their immediate means of intervening in the natural environment.

With the wide wireless access that we are now afforded through wireless Internet and phone services, we can be more "connected" than ever. These technologies foster a sense of personal control over space and time, as well as increased personal connections and increased efficiency (Katz, 44). Americans are social; they like being in touch with the larger world. Wireless communication provides sociability and mobility, while, at the same time, boasting freedom and independence. But are we really in control of this technology, or is it in control of us? The intrusive nature of wireless communications seems to be creating some unintended consequences. "Wireless communication not only makes others available to us more easily, it also makes us more easily available to others" (Katz, 14). This availability makes us more vulnerable to being regularly disturbed since we can be reached "any time, any place, and by anybody" (Katz, 36). The easier it is for people to contact us, makes it easier for them to exercise influence over us, and place demands on us.

Another affect of the intrusive nature of wireless is that it allows for our work-lives to infiltrate our personal and social lives, making us feel like we are never away from the office (Katz, 44). Because of the flexible and mobile nature of wireless

communication, employees are always expected to be available and are busier and more personally responsible for more info than at any other time in history (Wise, 157). So although wireless communications free us to be more social and interconnected than ever, the side-effect is that we are never free, we are slaves to anyone wishing to contact us, "anywhere, anytime." The irony of this technology is that while it is social in nature it is still an isolating force for individuals. It allows people "splendid solitude physically while maintaining personal influence and business presence remotely" (Katz, 33).

There have been countless previous warnings about the dehumanizing, deindividualizing influences of modern autonomous technology. The "plugged-in" human being is the virtual equivalent of a paraplegic; he is labeled the "terminal citizen" (Wise, 122). This is the notion that technology in the 21st century has become an extension of humans who have become digital (Wise, 155). The terminal citizen is characterized by having both the time and the resources to devote to a life on-line; he creates communities without commitment and argues for illusory freedoms, all the while becoming increasingly isolated and inert (Wise, 157). The problem of the terminal citizen is that it is formed by predominantly technological agency (Wise, 13). The terminal citizen is lacking any elements of humanity and has become merely a machine.

Although wireless availability will solve some past problems, it also potentially creates new ones. One of these unanticipated problems seems to be showing up with the maturing of the media generation, and their use of text messaging. People feel more comfortable saying things through technology that physical barriers would most likely discourage in a face-to-face encounter. Talking and messaging through media reduces the inhibitions that are normally contained in personal interactions. When people

communicate through a computer screen they sometimes forget that they are talking to a human being. The reduction of inhibitions through media can be extremely damaging to individuals, even unintentionally. Teens communicate through writing text messages, rather than talking on the phone, in order to secure *in-group* peer social connections (Katz, 47). The loss of the human element could result in a language of bullying or exclusion among today's teenagers. Teens also send text messages among themselves as an extended part of courting and dating rituals (Katz, 18). This could allow for social ties to be divorced from physical encounters, weakening physical dating barriers among teens (Putnam, 242). Another affect of the reduction of inhibitions through language in media could be that words and phrases that once held strong meaning are now ineffective and meaningless.

The dominant shift of technology over language that we are now seeing is central to the new social formation of today's youth (Wise, 113). Cell phone text messaging has created an entire language all its own. The language of "texting" can also be used to mask information from parents and teachers. This is especially threatening because wireless communication also makes in-person supervision and monitoring less necessary, and less frequent between parents and children. It can also have damaging affects on the social and conversational development of these youths that could affect not only their school achievement, but also interaction as adults.

Information and communication technologies pose relevant questions concerning privacy and anonymity (Katz, 15). Privacy issues that arise with wireless communication are users concerns about government censorship and oppression, corporate concerns about competition and production, and federal government concerns about national safety

and economic infrastructure (Wise, 146). Wireless communication, text messaging, and social networks such as MySpace and Facebook pose especially important privacy issues because they involve the most vulnerable section of the population. Young people are especially vulnerable to the intrusions of inappropriate images as well as the open access of their personal information to outsiders. Although extensive privacy controls are available, the problem is that people cannot make informed decisions to efficiently protect themselves (Huang, 1). Most people have little idea of who is getting access to their information through media sources. "What may emerge as the most important insight of the 21st century is that man was not designed to live at the speed of light" (McLuhan, 97).

<p style="text-align:center;">Affects of Urban and Suburban Life on Isolation</p>

The nature of community in today's urban metropolis, create high levels of disorder and fear of crime causing further isolation of the inhabitants of city life. Living in major metropolitan agglomerations weakens civic engagement and social capital (Putnam, 206). Urban settings sustain not a single, tightly integrated community, but a mosaic of loosely coupled communities (Putnam, 96). Even Mark Twain noticed the lonely American in the bustling city of New York in 1867. "New York is a splendid desert--a domed and steepled solitude, where a stranger is lonely in the midst of a million of his race." Even the bustling city robs us of some sense of public life and "getting to know" each other intimately (Bellah, 135).

Disorder and crime could be a part of the reason for the flight from the city to the suburbs. Levels of disorder in a neighborhood are closely related to crime rates and fear of crime (Skogan, 10). Disorder also affects community morale and cohesion,

independent of crime rates and fear (Skogan, 11). Order is defined by norms about public

behavior, these norms prescribe how people should behave in relation to their

neighborhoods, or while passing through a community (Skogan, 4). Sociologists at

University of Southern California found that crime has shifted from being an effect of

social and economic conditions, to being a cause of social and economic conditions as

well (Skogan, 13).

Disorder and crime lead to withdrawal from communities, because disorderly

conditions create anxiety and heighten fears (Skogan, 13). People lose a sense of "moral

reliability;" they no longer trust their neighbors to conform to proper behavior or actively

protect the community (Skogan, 48). This produces a vicious cycle because, as

communities become unpleasant to live in, people try to leave, and those who cannot

leave withdraw psychologically and isolate themselves. This withdrawal results in less

supervision of youths, weakens informal social controls, and undermines participation in

neighborhood affairs (Skogan, 13). Decline in the community's organizational and

political capacity due to withdrawal of residents allows for ever more disorder to take

place.

Anger and demoralization are frequently expressed consequences of disorder.

Many residents of urban areas note the demoralization they see in others, residents feel as

if "no one cares," and people simply "go their own separate way" (Skogan, 47).

> Where disorder problems are frequent and no one takes responsibility for
>
> unruly behavior in public places the sense of 'territoriality' among
>
> residents shrinks to include only their own households: meanwhile
>
> untended property is fair game for plunder or destruction (Skogan, 17).

Disorder problems increase fear of crime, because disorderly people and environments are unpredictable (Skogan, 47). These consequences of disorder create a cycle of the fear of crime; they increase people's sense of isolation for protection. In a community, that has no sense of reciprocity or public responsibility, people have the perception that they are on their own, with no one to rescue them.

Community organizations are an important means for tackling disorder problems (Skogan, 14). At times in history, when traditional neighborhood agents of social control (family, churches, schools and values) were strong, levels of social disorder remained low (Skogan, 126). However, as civic, political and social engagement have declined and lost their hold on community, disorder problems have worsened.

Another major cause for the increasing isolation of Americans may be suburban sprawl. Dissatisfaction with urban life and the lure of suburban lifestyle produce significant growth for suburbia. Disorder in urban areas may motivate people to flee to the suburbs, but the suburbs themselves harbor even more agents of isolation and privacy. "Suburbia is a collective effort to lead a private life," Lewis Mumford (Putnam, 210). The suburbs have been a central feature of American life since the mid-nineteenth century, largely driven by the revolution in transportation (Putnam, 208). The widespread use of the automobile has had an incredible impact on various aspects of the way we live our lives, starting with the way we build our towns.

The physical design of suburbs seems to start the domino effect of all the other vexations of suburban life. Traditional neighborhoods evolved organically in response to human needs. They were naturally occurring, pedestrian friendly, and diverse; and people's daily needs were located within reasonable walking distance of residential areas

(Duany, 4). Suburbia on the other hand is an invention, an idealized artificial system. It is characterized by cookie-cutter housing, wide, treeless, sidewalk free roadways, mindlessly curving cul-de-sacs, and a streetscape of garage doors (Duany, X). Sprawl is not healthy growth; it ignores historical precedent and human experience, and it is showing itself to be unsustainable, and self-destructive (Duany, 4). Sprawl cannot sustain itself financially, and it consumes land at an alarming rate, while producing insurmountable traffic problems and exacerbating social inequity and isolation (Duany, 4).

Suburban sprawl is characterized by five main, segregated components: housing subdivisions, shopping centers, office and business parks, civic institutions, and roadways (Duany, 6). Housing subdivisions are made up solely of residencies. Starting in the 1980s these subdivisions consisted of "master-planned" and "gated communities" (Putnam, 210). Gated communities imply that they are innately introverted, whereas traditional neighborhoods were innately extroverted (Putnam, 210). The single-family housing within these subdivisions is sometimes called the McMansion because it provides a great value for its price (Duany, 41). These McMansions provide a vast private realm. Ironically they are often identified by names that pay tribute to the natural or historic resources that they have displaced (Duany, 6). For example, in my home town one would find an abundance of street and neighborhood names along the lines of "Spreading Oaks," "Falling Leaf," and "Sun Meadows," just to name a few. These residential communities tend to be soulless and lacking in communal life.

Shopping centers are exclusively for shopping and can be distinguished from their traditional counterparts by the lack of housing and offices that used to abide above stores

in traditional towns. Suburban shopping centers are one story, "big box" chain stores, and are set within barren seas of parking, away from the street (Duany, X). Instead of old Main Street Five and Dime stores, with familiar faces, suburbanites shop in large impersonal malls (Putnam, 211). Shopping malls do not consist of interaction with people in a common social network; instead they are designed for the sole purpose of directing consumers to buy (Putnam, 211). Office and business parks serve only one purpose, work, and they are "ghost towns" after 6 pm (Duany, 6). Civic institutions are public buildings such as town halls, churches, and schools. Rather than being the focal points of the town, in suburbia they are usually scattered and unadorned due to limited funding (Duany, 6). The roadways are the vast grids that attempt to tie life in these disassociated towns back together, and they are usually clogged with miles of traffic.

"For the past 50 years we Americans have been building a national landscape that is largely devoid of places worth caring about" (Duany, X). Community cannot form in the absence of communal space, without places for people to get together and talk (Duany, 60). Unfortunately, segregatory zoning policies have excluded gathering places from residential areas (Putnam, 211). "In the absence of walkable public space, people of diverse ages, races, and beliefs are unlikely to meet and talk," further homogenizing these areas (Duany, 60). Diversity and socially viable communities are squashed by the segregated design codes of the suburbs.

"In suburbia, there is only one available lifestyle, to own a car and to need it for everything" (Duany, 25). This leads to increased separation between the worlds of work and family. Suburban areas are a traffic nightmare, because everyone is forced to drive everywhere. Traffic is worsened by the pattern of the roads, the sparse hierarchy.

Traditional road models were a web, but the sparse hierarchy model of road building consists of a single collector road that all smaller roads lead into where traffic bottlenecks (Duany, 22). The sparse hierarchy lacks a system of alternate back roads and short-cuts that would traditionally disperse traffic. Originally single-occupancy vehicles made for faster travel, however with today's traffic congestion, this method of transit is becoming increasingly inefficient. The car and the commute are not only inefficient, but they are also demonstrably bad for social community (Putnam, 213).

If we are always expanding the roads, why is traffic still so bad? Traffic is caused by a number of things, including commuting from the suburbs to the city, and a phenomenon called "induced traffic." Building more highways and widening existing roads does not reduce traffic, instead it induces more traffic (Duany, 88). The idea of increased road capacity makes people more willing to live further away from work, meaning more people are commuting (Duany, 89). "The real cause of traffic congestion is that people choose to put up with it" (Duany, 91). This means that the billions of dollars we have spent on road building have only accomplished one thing, they have increased the amount of hours we spend in our cars each day (Duany, 91).

Americans are commuting farther than ever before. Between 1983 and 1995, the average commute grew 37% longer in miles (Putnam, 213). Time spent commuting is time that we would otherwise be engaging in the public realm. "Life once spent enjoying the richness of community has increasingly become life spent alone behind the wheel" (Duany, XII). Over the last three decades driving alone has become the dominant mode of travel to work (Putnam, 212). The fraction of commuters who carpool had reached less than 10% in 2004, and the American adult spent on average 72 minutes every day behind

the wheel (Putnam, 212). This time is spent not only in a private space but also in a potentially sociopathic device. "Road-rage disorder" is a new founded disease that is quickly spreading, it stems from the fact that the social contract is voided when people become motorists (similar to the dehumanizing affects of technology) (Duany, 62). So not only does commuting in steel isolation chambers have negative affects on civic and social interactions, it also has potentially psychologically threatening aspects.

"The government pays seven times more to support the operation of the private car as to support public transportation" (Duany, 8). If this is the case, combined with all of the negative affects of lone commuting, then why is it that Americans do not utilize public transportation? The stressful two hour commute everyday could be used to sleep, read the news, or do a crossword if one were to take public transportation, yet mass transit systems have played a small and declining role in most metropolitan areas nationwide (Putnam, 212). Public transportation would seem to be a viable solution to the problems associated with commuting, if only we had a viable public transportation system to use. The Interstate Highway Act of 1956, provided 41,000 miles of highway paid 90% by the government at an initial cost of $26 billion (Duany, 8). Around this same time a consortium of auto, tire and oil companies purchased and tore up over one hundred street car systems nationwide, an act for which General Motors was convicted of criminal conspiracy and fined $5,000 (Duany, 8). Even if we had viable transportation, it is likely that it would not solve the problem, though it may provide some relief. Americans as we have seen are individualistic, and they value their freedom; they do not want to be enslaved by someone else's time schedule.

Suburban sprawl not only has physical affects on isolated lifestyles, it also affects the family and social structure of communities. Working fathers (and increasingly mothers), as well as stay at home moms, teenagers and children are all directly affected by sprawl. Perhaps the most worrisome affects are those facing suburban children. The structural design of the suburb restricts children's mobility to the end of the subdivision. Children are constantly dependent on an adult to drive them around; they are unable to practice at becoming adults (Duany, 116). The term used to describe these children is "cul-de-sac" kids--frozen in a form of infancy, utterly dependent on others and lacking the ability to introduce variety or diversity into their lives (Duany, 117). These children grow up to be overly dependent on their parents because they were robbed of the opportunity to make choices and exercise judgment on their own (Duany, 117). This also restricts moms, termed "soccer moms," they are trapped by the burden of constantly chauffeuring kids around (Duany, 117). In some cases, especially with multiple children, these moms are forced to give up their jobs in order to be a taxi driver.

Another threat of suburban life is to "bored teenagers" (Duany, 119). With less mobility, until they are 16, these youths have a shortage of leisure resources available to them, which could facilitate them looking for "exciting ways" to overcompensate for their boredom. Some have suggested this to be the culprit of the multiple high-school shootings in recent years. One might speculate that "the sterility of the suburbs--their very unreality--could make the leap to fantasy more possible" (Duany, 121). Once teens reach driving age they face yet another danger. In order to decrease their own burden, suburban parents, who can afford to, will buy additional cars to provide independence to their children (Duany, 119). The suburbs have the appeal of being safer than the city, but

a child is twenty times more likely to die in an auto accident than from gang activity, for some this may prove one way that the city is safer than the suburb. Isolation and boredom, two symptoms of suburban teens, are also two likely causes of the second most likely cause of death among teens, suicide (Duany, 120). Suicide accounts for over 12% of youth mortalities. We must ask ourselves what we are sacrificing for a more private life.

According to urbanist architects Andres Duany and Elizabeth Plater-Zybek, "The suburb is the last word in privatization, perhaps even its lethal consummation, and it spells the end of authentic civic life" (Putnam, 210). "The problem with suburbia is not that it is ugly. The problem with suburbia is that, in spite of all its regulatory controls, it is not functional" (Duany, 14). Suburbia does not efficiently serve society or preserve the environment (Duany, 14). Suburbanization has not only increased our financial investment, but our time investment as well (Putnam, 212). Not only does suburbia suck resources and time at an alarming rate, but these homogenous communities hamper the understanding of diversity and community integration. These aspects are the keys that draw citizens into the public and political realm because they engage us in productive local conflict about political interests (Putnam, 210). Homogeneity allows us to too easily withdraw from the political sphere, which was one of Tocqueville's biggest fears. Perhaps the most regrettable fact is that the exact same components of the suburb could have been assembled into socially functional cities and neighborhoods (Duany, 12). Ambiguous residents of unincorporated counties could instead be involved citizens enjoying the quality of life that these places could potentially provide (Duany, 12). The choice is ours!

Bureaucratic Rationality: McDonalization of America

The last important cause of the increasingly private way of American life, that I have found, is bureaucratic organization and its rationalization of life in society. The term "McDonaldization" is appropriate because all of the dimensions of the McDonald strategy for success, efficiency, predictability, and calculability, can be relevantly applied to our society today (Ritzer, 11). McDonaldization has spread to almost every aspect of our society in the 21st century. This bureaucratic rationality is especially found in the modern workplace. It is first important for us to realize that the workplace is the chief living area for most Americans; we spend more time at work than at home.

Weber's Theory of Rationality demonstrates how the Western world has become increasingly rational (Ritzer, 22). Rationality refers to the elements of efficiency, predictability, calculability, and non-human technologies to control people and dominate life in the United States (Ritzer, 22). This system assumes the necessity for the sacrifice of the human element of expressive individualism for productivity and utilitarian efficiency. Individuals are required to deny their own judgment of the best means for attaining the objective in order for everyone to make the same decision (Ritzer, 23). Subordinates are to follow the rules without asking questions, and those in charge are free to make creative choices (Ritzer, 125). Ronald Takaki calls this rationalized bureaucratic organization an "iron cage" (Ritzer, 25). "The self is placed in confinement, it is emotionally controlled, and its spirit subdued" (Ritzer, 25). Bureaucracies are cages where people are trapped and denied their humanity.

The bureaucratic system may be efficient in some sense, but scholars have found that this type of rational system ends up contradicting itself by producing its opposite.

The irrationality of rationality demonstrates the unintended consequences of Western bureaucracy. Who really benefits from efficiency? The evidence of the irrationality of rationality can be seen in the costs of McDonaldization. The real consequences of rationality turn out to be inefficiency, illusions of various types, disenchantment, dehumanization and homogenization (Ritzer, 124). Bureaucracies emphasize quantification of everything; however, the quantitative approach leaves little room for the concern of quality work (Ritzer, 23).

Bureaucracies also thrive on the notion of efficiency; however, most of the gains from efficiency go to those who are pushing rationalization, not to the consumers (Ritzer, 125). They present an illusion of efficiency to the general public; as long as the general public believes the illusion, there will not be an outcry about the actual situation (Ritzer, 126). For example, ATMs and self checkouts claim to be for the consumers' benefit, so they don't have to wait in line, but, in actuality, we are just paying to do the work of the checkers, baggers and tellers ourselves. Disenchantment and dehumanization are evident in the high turnover rates of these bureaucratic settings, such as assembly line jobs (Ritzer, 137). The evidence of the destructiveness of quantification and rationalization in assembly line jobs can be found in high rates of absenteeism and tardiness as well as high turnover (Ritzer, 139).

Assembly line jobs are dehumanizing and alienating in nature for both the employee and the customer. The culture of the drive-through window and fast food restaurants has detrimental affects on social interaction whether it is obvious or not. The McDonaldization of society is yet another reason for our increased privatization. "Fast-food restaurants minimize contact between human beings, relationships between

employees and customers are fleeting at best" (Ritzer, 139). Drive-through windows

provide speedy service and physical barriers not to mention robbing mealtime of its

historically social nature. Diners are reduced to automatons rushing (indeed often

working) through a meal with little gratification from the dining experience or the food

(Ritzer, 137). Even at home, the dining experience may consist of microwavable food

eaten in front of the TV; this "fast-food nation" is a crucial contributor to the

disintegration of family (Ritzer, 141). Even the employees are unlikely to build

relationships due to high turnover rates (Ritzer, 140). McDonaldization and bureaucratic

rationality feed our over-stimulated and fast-paced lifestyle, which in turn helps to

deteriorate social interactions even further.

Conclusion: So what now?

Although we may like to blame a lack of time and money for the demise of community

and relational solidarity in America today, we must realize that these are truly secondary

effects. Our cultural values contribute greatly to our segregation and privacy, and these

values tend to exacerbate the problems that technology, suburbanization, and our rational

bureaucratic lifestyles pose to today's community. The issue of social solidarity is one

that we should realize and be concerned about because it effects our every day lives, our

psychological well being and our quality of life in this country.

Why is social capital so important? The issue of our increasingly disengaged,

private and isolated lives is one that is growing increasingly imperative if we are to

continue prospering as a nation. We can find the consequences of disengagement all

around us. Being involved with others in the public realm could solve so many present

ills, from education of our youth to the economic prosperity of our nation; it could improve everything from our healthcare systems to our national and individual safety. The youth of today are suffering the effects of the disengagement of their parents. They deserve a full life too; and by getting involved in active communities we can improve education and children's welfare as well as provide safe and productive neighborhoods to live in.

Aside from solving the societal ills that we face in today's world, social capital can have amazing affects on our individual health and well-being. Humans are social beings, we crave social interaction, and yet we consistently deprive ourselves of it. Many studies have shown the positive correlation between social capital and health both psychologically and physically. "The more integrated we are with our community, the less likely we are to experience colds, heart attacks, strokes, cancer, depression, and premature death of varying sorts" (Putnam, 326). Isolation, on the other hand, is usually associated with biomedical risk factors such as smoking, drinking, overeating, elevated blood pressure and all the side effects that come with these. Strong social networks can alleviate psychological pains as well because they provide a network of support and can provide tangible assistance to problems such as financial worries and unemployment. Social integration can even serve as a physiological triggering mechanism to stimulate people's immune systems to fight disease and buffer stress (Putnam, 327). Research dealing with isolation in animals suggests that social isolation has measurable biochemical effects on the body. These implications for our well-being offer the intriguing possibility that social interaction can generally better our everyday lives. By spending quality time together, through meaningful, physical interactions, humans can

mutually promote their social well-being while simultaneously creating a better quality of life for individuals and humanity as a whole.

If we can stop looking in the mirror and start looking out the window, we can easily turn the effects of our privatized culture around. We cannot change the traditions on which America was founded, but we can alter the way we think about them. Through a true appreciation of our freedom and equality, we may realize that we will do more good by sharing rather than hoarding. We can organize efforts to reinvigorate our informal social controls in order to make more harmonious neighborhoods. We can reverse the influences of federal policy and zoning laws, and especially reduce our demands on the automobile and transform our towns into environments worth living in. By increasing our community involvement and actively exercising our political rights we have the power to change things. We can improve both society and our own lives by just getting out of the house to spend time with friends; it is that simple. If we turn off the television, and pull ourselves away from our computers and cell phones, it may be easier for us to recognize the uniqueness of humanity. Recognition of the value of human diversity should further inspire us to help others and appreciate the people that make this world the extraordinary place that it has the potential to be.

<div align="center">The Good News</div>

The problems of community deterioration are now being recognized after years of silently infiltrating our society. We now see the damaging effects of our isolation. New social, environmental and political movements tell us that we are aware of what is happening. People are starting to realize the dangers we face, and this is motivating

change. It seems that we may be seeing the beginning of a turnaround in the trends of our civic and political engagement.

One of the biggest movements going on today that suggests people are becoming more involved and actively cooperating for change is the "green movement." Today people are realizing how important the environment is and are taking a stand to protect the health and resources of our earth. This concern for the sustainability of resources is bringing people together for a common goal. As we become more aware of the effects of climate change and global warming more people and companies are promoting "green" living; and are trying to find out more efficient ways to use renewable resources. Almost anything now has an energy efficient or renewable alternative, from light bulbs and household appliances to clothes and fabrics that are earth friendly. Since eco-friendly products more readily available to consumers, marketing and sales have soared for "green" products. The intriguing thing about this movement is that, even though it has an environmental agenda, it can still bring people together by common ties, it motivates people to work collectively. Environmental groups are one of the most common forms of political group membership in the United States, and this movement has caused their membership levels to steadily increase. Greenpeace is one the largest of these organizations with a membership of 250,000 in the U.S. alone (Greenpeace). The climate change crisis has acted as an incredible force to get people together for a common goal to benefit everyone. If people start making more noise about other issues as well, we may likely see a domino affect of positive action that could stimulate community involvement and strong social networking.

Politics have also seen a wave of action lately. We are in the midst of one of the most interestingly dynamic elections of our generation. The presidential election this year will be different than ever before. Barack Obama's campaign slogan is "Change you can believe in." The massive influence of this campaign has made it evident that some Americans know there is a problem and they want change. Voter registration and turnout at local caucuses have reached record highs in many states. In some locations, turnout so drastically exceeded expectations that it caused major ballot shortages, and people waited in line long after the intended closing hours. Much of his campaign is based on grass roots movements of community organization to solve problems. He is pushing for a change from the bottom up. The success of his campaign, and even unrelated increases in political involvement in this election would make one think that Americans really want change.

Although some people seem to say they are ready to contribute to a massive societal change, who will really do so? The good news is that people see the problems and seem to want them to change; however, the potentially bad news is the question of whether they are really willing to take it upon themselves to seek solutions. It is easy for people to expect change from a presidential candidate and other authority figures, but it is challenging for individuals to initiate that change themselves. People have to be willing to get their hands dirty and do the work if they really want things to change. For us to see any societal change we must first see an attitude change in individuals; but this kind of attitude transformation will not occur naturally on its own.

Leadership on the local, regional and national level is required to motivate people to step up to leadership roles and take social responsibility for themselves and others in

their communities. People can take action by exercising their political rights. Democracy, "of the people and by the people;" we can play an active role both by stepping up to local leadership roles and by taking political responsibility to ensure that our everyone's voice is heard. Communities are an interlocking web, we all depend on one another to provide leadership and examine our own duties and responsibilities. Grass roots movements bring people together, but change is not fully plausible without some kind of power and leadership. In a democracy, such as this one, people have some control over whom they follow; Americans have the power to elect strong and righteous leaders to motivate them into a better future. We can hope that people really do want to take action to work for change. I guess we will have to just wait and see.

We have seen the devastating effects that isolating ourselves can have, and we know that people working together can get much more done than those working alone, so what are we waiting for? The bottom line is that ordinary people working together can accomplish extraordinary things. We can break through this isolated state and touch people, we can reweave the bonds of community; but to do this we first need to change our consciousness, the way we think about one another. If we build communities of diversity and understanding, we may be better able to mutually serve one another. We have the ability to combat the widespread disease of loneliness in this country by building stable communities and enjoying those around us. We should be living life hand-in-hand.

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