

Ben Sasse is not a typical politician, and he says explicitly that this is not a policy book. He is not telling you how he is going to take care of you. There is no plan to save the world. He describes the many, many ills of our education system with the knowledgeable perspective of the son and husband of teachers - and tells you he is home schooling his children.

This book consists of his observations on how to raise successful children. He cites other authors who have given the issue some thought. These include Rousseau and John Dewey, with whom he often disagrees, and Diane Ravitch and John Gatto writing about public schools. He is an educated man who wants the best for his children.

Sasse is a US Senator. He envisions that the problems he identifies must be resolved within the polity that is the United States. Hirschmann wrote in 1970 that there are three choices when one is confronted with a difficult problem: [[ASIN:0674276604 Exit, Voice, and Loyalty]]. Sasse addresses the second of them – he assumes the problems are fixable. Unlike most politicians, he sees that the people must be an active part of the solution. It cannot be imposed from above.

Sociologists identify many markers associated with becoming an adult. Eight big ones are:

1. Moving from parents' home
2. Leaving school for the final time
3. Getting a full-time job
4. Reaching economic self-sufficiency
5. Loss of virginity
6. Getting married
7. Having children
8. Establishing an independent household

These passages provide structure to life. They used to happen systematically, and in a somewhat predictable order. For millennials (1980-95, per Sasse) and Gen Z this is no longer the case. As President of Midland University, Sasse noted an unwillingness to engage and to finish jobs, an unwillingness to think things through, and an unwillingness to grapple with things as an adult.

Unless we can turn these trends around, there is nothing that can be done at a policy level to restore the country. Sasse's book is primarily addressed to parents: how to raise children to become real adults.

His book (outline below) is divided into two parts: identifying the problem and suggesting things that individuals can do to address it within their own families.

Introduction: My Kids “Need” Air Conditioning

Part I Our Passivity Problem

....One: Stranded in Neverland

....Two: From Little Citizens to Baby Einsteins

....Three: More School Isn't Enough

Part II An Active Program

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....Seven: Travel to See

....Eight: Build a Bookshelf

....Nine: Make America an Idea Again

## Postscript: Why This Wasn't a Policy Book

Sasse is uniquely well prepared to write on these themes. Son of a churchgoing high school wrestling coach, fourth generation in the small town of Fremont, Nebraska, he worked on farms as a kid. His drive and intellect powered him through five academic degrees, including Harvard and Yale, a career in consulting and (at age 37) a university presidency. He married a fellow Christian and has two teenage daughters and a kindergarten aged son.

This is an outstanding book. My reading notes below follow Sasse's chapter outline.

### Notes on - Introduction: My Kids "Need" Air Conditioning

Sasse's experience as President of Midland University led him to organize and articulate his concerns about the millennial generation. They don't know what hardship is. They are not involved – they are passive consumers of, and complainers about, all that is offered them. Their lives revolve around copout devices (my term) such as video games and social media. The children are not involved as meals being cooked, doing housework, or much else.

He writes "since arriving in the Senate in 2015, my colleagues and I have had discussions on many urgent national problems – from healthcare to immigration, from cybersecurity to new job creation. All of the proposed solutions to address these problems are meaningless, though, if we lack an educated, resilient citizenry capable of navigating the increasing complexities of life." Sasse says that he has organized the book around five broad themes (which, incidentally, track with the chapter outline of Part II of the book):

- One. Overcome peer culture.
- Two. Work hard.
- Three. Resist consumption.
- Four. Travel to experience the difference between "need" and "want".
- Five. Become truly literate.

### Chapter 1: Stranded in Neverland.

Sasse starts with a retelling of Peter Pan, in which everybody but Peter eventually grows up.

Adolescence is a new concept. From the Romans through the Renaissance they defined three seven year periods: infancy, childhood, and puberty, then adulthood at 21. Or, a page at 7, a squire at 14 and knight at 21. Sasse says that childhood has been shortened and adulthood postponed, resulting in a long adolescence with no strong expectations it will ever lead to adulthood.

Sasse attributes the change to "five big developments in the United States in the first decades after World War II."

- First is material abundance.
- Second, nobody knows how to produce anymore
- Third, the nuclear family falling apart.
- Fourth, universal schooling: Nobody remembers how it was without it,
- Fifth, the protests movement of the 60s.

He closes "arguably the most fundamental cleavage in American life is between those who came of age after rather than before the baby boom"

Sasse cites the debate in schools that took place about 1900 between the people who wanted to truly educate people in high school and the pragmatists who wanted to simply prepare boatloads of immigrants for the workplace. Diane Ravitch writes the authoritative history in [\[\[ASIN:0743203267 Left Back: A Century of Battles over School Reform\]\]](#).

Sasse says that John Dewey had an oversized impact. Dewey pretended to be totally pragmatic. Sasse writes, on the contrary, that "We are necessarily within arm's length of large questions about whether your kids on their deathbeds will be able to look back on lives oriented toward the good, the true, and the beautiful." A meaningful life cannot ignore the deeper issues.

Sasse writes that we have two views as to how the world is broken – and we all agreed it is. One school says that the corruption originates inside of us, while the other counters that social structures corrupt from outside. He calls them the romantic and the realistic view. Burke would be the prototype of the first point of view. Man is endowed with original sin, and needs society to keep him in line. Rousseau, the original romantic, advocates the second. He said "Man is born free yet everywhere in chains." Sasse talks about Rousseau's book [[ASIN:1512156531 Emile]] because it brings up the right issues, even though Sasse disagreed with most of it.

Dewey comes in with a third point of view. Stop debating realism versus romance. His overarching motive seems to have been to have to secure quality universal schooling for everyone. He was a great progressive, wanting to ensure that the flood of immigrants (then, southern and eastern Europeans) were included. Sasse writes "I will argue, even if you share his progressive goals down to the last one, he is responsible for allowing schools to undermine how Americans want to turn children into adults."

## Chapter 2 - From Little Citizens to Baby Einsteins

Sasse talks about the history of work. Up until 150 years ago, you simply did what your parents did. After school became the norm, you would graduate and choose a job that you could expect to hold onto for a lifetime. Up until the 1970s, it was often a job with your hands. That world of lifetime jobs working with your hands is not coming back. Sasse says that just as we need to be preparing our children for a lifetime of learning and career changes, we are in the process of abandoning them to Neverland, blissfully unaware of their past or their future.

Sasse lists again the eight markers for coming-of-age mentioned in the body of the review. He proposes that losing one's virginity didn't become a marker in the 60s; it had started half a century earlier with cars. That was not my experience. When I was in high school in Berkeley in 1950s, thought we would have wanted it to be otherwise, most of the guys I knew were virgins. The few girls who we knew were not were talked about in whispers.

Back then there was a predictable order in the steps of achieving adulthood. However, we had gone from 10% of teenagers attending school in the 1890s to more than 75% by 1945. Back when children were expected to work, they were regarded as apprentice workers, not yet experts. Little citizens. Not to be coddled but to be encouraged to continue to contribute more and more.

There was a divide between America and Europe. Sasse contends that in Europe children were already being coddled and protected from an adult responsibility in the 19th century. Sasse lists nine changes of our less intentional approach to shaping our offspring as they come of age.

1. More medication.
2. More screen time: Five million Americans consume more than 45 hours of video games per week.
3. More pornography
4. More years under mom's roof.
5. Less marriage: The average age at marriage has risen from 22 to 28 since 1950. 20% of all Americans over 25 have always been single. African Americans reject marriage at about twice the rate of whites. Many people simply say that marriage is not important to them.
6. Less religious participation
7. Little citizens no more. Young Americans simply do not know about the country. The NAEP shows that they fall short. As a result, Sasse says their love of country has fallen. I would add

to this that what is taught in school makes them reject their nation. The Howard Zinn type of history is poison. This reviewer's three millennial children (b. 1982, 83 and 88) were specifically and extensively taught about the evils committed on the Trail of Tears, at Wounded Knee, by slavery, at Manzanar, and by men against women. This teaching was not offset by anything favorable our straight WASP forebears might have done.

Sasse writes that many of the young find socialism more attractive than capitalism because it sounds better. They have no historical basis for judging. I add from my experience, the children are not taught of the miseries of communism or present-day socialist failures such as Venezuela. As a substitute history teacher in DC private schools I found the socialist worldview pervasive among students. It was even worse at the U of Md. grad school of education.

8. More intellectually fragile. Sasse writes of trigger warnings and safe spaces. All this coddling simply does not prepare them for the workplace. Keeping up with millennial's need for feedback can drive a manager crazy.
9. Softer parenting. This includes helicopter parenting. Parents reduce the kids' initiative. As a professor, Sasse had parents calling him to complain about the kids' grades. He writes extensively about Dr. Spock's impact. Spock' opinions, and those of his acolytes (Sadkers, Alfie Kohn, et. al.) guided the philosophy in the Episcopal schools my kids attended. The other parents, including my ex-wife, bought it all. The result was not good for any of our kids.

As a high school attendance rose from 2% to 75% in the 60 years ending in 1950 a new youth culture appeared. The children were unchaperoned and in each other's company. Here I recite my own experience as a high school student in the 1950s. Yes this is true. We had some good give-and-take with the teachers, who remained more professional and engaged than they are today, but we did indeed have our own culture.

Neil Postman says that the disappearance of childhood coincides pretty much with the advent of television. Previously, children had needed to learn in order to access the secret world of adult knowledge. Now, it simply poured into the living room on the tube. I strongly second this. Born in 1942, I was eight before our family got a TV. I considered Howdy Doody to be puerile and seldom watched. My friends and I spent our afternoons playing in the hills, building dams and chasing lizards. We played bridge, hearts and pinochle with our parents. There was a marked change even with my siblings just two and four years younger.

Other significant changes happened between our generations. At my 1960 high school prom the band still played "Blue Moon," "I'm in the Mood for Love" and "Canadian Sunset." Uplifting songs, glorifying love and marriage. They played the Perry Como song by the title "Love and Marriage." Four years changed it to "If you can't be with the one you love, love the one you're with."

The drug scene swept through like a wave. When I experimented with pot in 1962 I felt like a pioneer. By 1964 everybody was talking about it. Two years more and everybody was doing it. When I started, LSD and peyote were not yet illegal and amphetamines were widely prescribed. It was not long before everything was outlawed – and usage nonetheless universal.

Sasse writes that there is a question of what to call these people who are not yet adults. They call them emerging adults, or pre-adulthood, and they say that they are facing a so-called quarter-life crisis in transitioning into adulthood.

In any case, it's a rich country problem. Rich children are not impelled to become adults and they often don't. Living in Ukraine, I see much less of the problem than exists in the United States, but even Ukraine has its "golden youth" who make Facebook posts about their experiences all over the world and appear not to be in the process of preparing for adulthood.

Sasse writes that childhood is no longer very nurturing or goal oriented. Childhood amorously tapers off by the late teens, it is an. It extends between infancy and the age of 25 or 30, interrupted

temporarily by the biologically awkwardness of puberty (which is confusingly now arriving 3 to 5 years earlier for girls than historical norms).

Deflecting all blows that our kids might experience does them a disservice. We should give them adult responsibilities as they can take them, and let them feel what adulthood is like.

### Chapter 3: More School Isn't Enough

Sasse describes the horrors that his wife found in teaching in a high school. This is worldwide, and has been well described in any number of books. Among those I review are Ravitch, above, and: [[ASIN:0945700040 The Underground History of American Education: A School Teacher's Intimate Investigation Into the Problem of Modern Schooling]], [[ASIN:0674018141 Judging School Discipline: The Crisis of Moral Authority]], [[ASIN:0226028569 Academically Adrift: Limited Learning on College Campuses]], [[ASIN:B00UHOFKMM Deutschland ist auf (k)einem guten Weg - Eine gesellschaftspolitische Analyse mit autobiografischen Zügen (German Edition)]] and [[ASIN:1484873831 The Swedish Story: From extreme experiment to normal nation]], The Dumbest Generation: How the Digital Age Stupefies Young Americans and Jeopardizes Our Future (Or, Don't Trust Anyone Under 30) and The Death and Life of the Great American School System.

The problems America has long had in schooling are showing themselves in Europe as well, and for the same reasons. Many of the problems can be honestly addressed, and are, as Ravitch and Gatto do. However, politicians simply cannot afford to speak the truth about the different populations of schoolchildren. Google "Arthur Jensen 1968" to see what happened to one bold soul who tried to do so as far back as fifty years ago. Google " Moynihan Nixon Jensen Herrnstein" for a story of political cowardice – or realism – from that era.

I note that Ukrainian schools, despite all of the problems of lack of resources, probably do a better job of preparing kids. That's because they don't have to worry about social promotion and I don't have to make worry about making kids feel dumb. The kids are all of the same ethnic background. The dumb ones look just like the smart ones.

Dewey proposed that the school must become the center of the social life of the child. That meant that it displaced other institutions that might have served that role – church, scouts, athletics and family. Dewey appears to have been an early skeptic of "drill and kill," an opponent of rote learning and too much reading. I note that my elementary teachers in the 1940s felt no qualms about making me learn my times tables. My millennial children, in expensive private schools, did not. They still can't manage arithmetic easily.

My observation is that children learn from people they respect – smart people. Schools often don't put smart people in the classroom. Nor could they, for the salaries we pay and the obstacles they put the way of conscientious teachers. Sasse says that we need to replace or fix the entire system. He is absolutely right. However, that would be impossible. It has far too big of a political constituency. More than that, too few people demand quality. Sasse himself has chosen the right approach: home schooling. It is especially important in that he lives in Washington DC, which is riven by a diverse population. (NB: I was a parent, teacher and trustee in DC private schools – see the comment on my own experience and qualifications). He is fortunate to have a place he belongs, Fremont, Neb, populated by family and people like himself. I had none of that in Washington D.C. It is one of the things I treasure about raising my second family in Kiev.

With regard to letting kids learn by experience, Sasse quotes a typically wrongheaded point of view: "Young adults cannot be expected to know or understand the full ramifications of their roles in the economy without close guidance, particularly in the early years of their careers." wrote Matthew Lynch, a Virginia education expert. That is absolute nonsense. They have to learn as they go.

Sasse writes in a section entitled "Learn how to learn."

We need to recognize the importance of the trivium, which would be grammar, dialectic and rhetoric. We need to learn how to organize and present thoughts. The oral is increasingly important. In my childhood it was written, because people read newspapers and books. In this day and age, the written is important, but we have to re-recognize the fact that most people deal with media. Question for you, my reader. How many people will ever read this comment? You are right: very few, but quite bright. If I want to make a difference I should have a video on Facebook or YouTube, or a Ted Talk. NB: I do that on climate. Google "graham seibert global warming."

Sasse goes into the active/passive aspect of education. Teachers I know call it The Dixie cup model. Open the kid's head and pour in knowledge. It is backwards. The true model is, "students learn," not "teachers teach."

Commenting on the passive model Gatto writes: "The main consequences for students are: emotional confusion, social class disparity, indifference, passivity, intellectual dependency on experts, conditional self-esteem, and surveillance by those in charge."

We can never accept Moynihan and Jensen's (above) observations as a basis for framing public school policy because they would be denounced as racist. We might tackle it from a different direction. Go with the tenor of the times and allow every little group to do its own educational thing. Celebrate diversity in education. Let Jews raise their kids according to a Jewish pattern. Let Chinese to raise their kids by a Chinese pattern. Let Black parents raise their kids to be Black. I note that some of the most enthusiastic home schoolers in Washington and Baltimore are successful, predominantly intact Black families who have given up on the public schools. If such ventures succeed, eventually white parents might be left alone to raise their kids to be who they are. But don't hold your breath.

As an aside, a strong indicator of the value of home schooling is that it is against the law in Sweden and Germany. They do not allow parents any way out of enforced multiculturalism, and the school system that results from it. For a good, albeit dated assessment see [\[\[ASIN:0674010531 Diversity in America: Keeping Government at a Safe Distance\]\]](#). Read also "The Swedish Story," link provided above.

One thing that Sasse doesn't state but is inherently obvious is the need for her mother and father to be working as a team. If the couple is not in agreement, they default to letting the government choose the curriculum, the pacing, and the content (viz, sex education) that their children will experience. Parents do a better job.

## Part II: An Active Program

Having outlined the problems in Part I, Sasse gives his own advice, not as a public office holder but as a parent and educator. He gives five pieces of advice, character building habits that will prepare children for the many diverse stages of life that lie ahead. These track the five chapters to follow:

First, breaking free of the tyranny of one generation.

Second, develop a work ethic.

Third embrace limited consumption

Fourth learn how to travel and travel light.

Fifth, learn how to read and decide what to read.

## Chapter 4: Four: Flee Age Segregation

We are very self-segregating by age. We go by birth cohort through the schools and we likewise go by cohorts into senior citizens homes. Sasse talks about death and confronting the reality of our mortality, facing it bravely. Also about our tendency to deny aging. Sasse talks about sex. He observes that to talk only about the act, the pleasure, diminishes it and leaves it hollow. Unfortunately

that is what we do with the schools. While they can't teach things of substance, they spread a secular message that sex is nothing more than the act.

There is a relationship between monogamy and happiness in general, Sasse quotes. This is truer for women than men. And this is probably because monogamous couples are not looking for more in sex than can be found. They look for their happiness, their fulfillment and other things. He talks about the reality of birth, and the profound feeling of being there at birth.

He writes about the "Three purposes of sex: First, from an anthropological or Judeo-Christian standpoint, sex has always been seen as a covenant initiation and a covenant renewal ceremony. Fundamentally, the act of the flesh of two different people becoming one has been to say, in effect, that they are engaged in a unique relationship, one that is different from all others. They are now intimates." "Sex's second purpose is procreation, and its third is pleasure."

## Chapter Five: Embrace Work Pain

This chapter is about the work ethic. It starts with an account of his grandmother running a farm all by herself when his grandfather was often the war. A formative experience for Sasse was five years in charge of Midland University. He discovered that most of the students simply had no work ethic and no work experience. They consider themselves to be highly entitled consumers and had no sense of that personal responsibility in doing things. He writes "Although it is not universally fair, millennials have acquired a collective reputation as needy, undisciplined, coddled, presumptuous, lacking much of a filter between their public personas in their inner lives. As one New York Times story about millennials in the workplace put it, managers struggle with their young employees 'sense of entitlement, a tendency to overshare on social media, and frankness verging on insubordination.'"

"Our students coming-of-age crisis is not limited to lacking self-restraint, but more broadly reflects that they do not understand what self-restraint is, and why is necessary for them individually, and why they should be frightened at our lack of it, collectively." Sasse describes his own first jobs in rural Nebraska – walking beans and tasseling corn. Tough work, work was physically hard and unpleasant: tassels of the corn would give you corn rash.

## Chapter 6 Consume Less.

Sasse talks quotes Arthur Brooks, president of the American Enterprise Institute, saying that half of happiness is genetic – you can't influence that. This is widely known. [[ASIN:0965683621 Phillipe Rushton]] is among many who have written on its heritability. Another quarter is simply avoiding the horrific events such as war, famine epidemic. But the last quarter is under our control. Therefore, Sasse enumerates the drivers of happiness: faith, family, community, and work. Just after I noticed that these quite closely paralleled Charles Murray's [[ASIN:030745343X Coming Apart: The State of White America, 1960-2010]], Sasse himself quoted Murray.

Another expert, Gretchen Rubin, suggests that our habits and our self-mastery must determine whether we will build and strengthen those essential relationships with spouse, children, and neighbors.

Sasse cites Christian Smith's book [[ASIN:0199828024 Lost in Transition: The Dark Side of Emerging Adulthood]]. The kids – generation Z and the millennials – are materialistic and are unreflexive about the fact that they are materialistic. There is no introspection. Sasse paraphrases Thomas Hobbes, saying that prior to agriculture life was nasty, brutish and short. (Note that not all agree – see [[ASIN:147292293X Built on Bones: 15,000 Years of Urban Life and Death]]. But society certainly did become denser and the societies pulled themselves together into specialized work categories.)

Sasse next talks about how the deforestation of England pushed the search for an alternate fuel, which turned out to be coal. That inspired the industrial age. In the industrial age has been running ever since, making us richer and richer generation after generation. Until now.

Up until the industrial revolution, most people were generalists, producing almost everything they needed. Now, most of us have become specialists. Sasse says that by 1830s and 1840s, Americans were no longer living on the edge. They could not by and large be wiped out by a single bad harvest or bad winter. Consumerism started. There was a fashion revolution in clothing. No longer just what you needed but what you could afford to buy.

Problems cropped up. The boom and bust cycles were ruinous. Thousands of farmers were done in, not by the weather, but the banks. Conspicuous consumption was coined as a term in the 1890s and it flowered in America with mass production. Want seems to have triumphed over need.

We need some stoicism, needs to forget about consumerism. Stoicism represents self-discipline and brings happiness. Consumerism does not.

We need to consume less, not less. Make do with cold showers. Not bitch when the electricity is off or the water heater is out or the bus is not running. We must learn to be tough.

## Chapter 7 Travel to See

There is a story about how his father in his buddies would go off into the wilds of Canada and the 1960s, just after finals to fish and live off the land. Ben did the same thing, although not as extravagantly. But the key thing that is that he and his buddies went alone with no other adults on the trip. They planned it, and they did it themselves. They were self-sufficient.

Sasse is against consumer tourism. If you let a tour guide do it, you'll see the tourist attractions and not the country itself. Sasse contends that a traveler is active, the tourist is passive.

He offers excellent advice. Prepare for your trip by reading up on your destination and if possible learning the language. Travel light and live off the land – you will learn more. Stay in places where the natives stay and travel on trains and buses they use. You will meet far more people.

The best travel I did with growing children was through home exchanges, bike trips and Habitat for Humanity. The home exchange puts you in a neighborhood and gives you a car to see the countryside. Play with local kids in the pool, eat and shop where the locals do. The bicycling vacation gives the kids exercise and a chance to see a foreign country without a windshield in the way. And Habitat for Humanity gives them a chance to do something physical, which Sasse and I would agree is essential. Go on a Habitat trip and be prepared to be ashamed of how incompetent your fellow Americans are at simple tasks like digging with a shovel, hammering nails and cutting rebar. If you can prepare your kids by teaching them these things, they will (rather, should – I never succeeded) glow with pride at being able to keep up with the natives. Then ask them to reflect how it is that these very competent people have incomes of less than 5% of American families. It is sobering.

## Chapter Eight: Build a Bookshelf

Sasse advocates extensive reading. The question is, what.

The canon, the Harvard Classics or Great Books series, are a thing of the past. Although they are well worth reading, they address the great ideas of all history, they will not resonate with your kids' peers – or even your own. In other words, your kid will simply find nobody to discuss Thucydides, Gibbon, or even Ariel and Will Durant with. What people will have read, and what can be discussed, are more recent books. I would advocate starting with more accessible texts and working backwards. As you encounter classical references, write them down and make a point of reading those classics.



I would advocate following our leading blogs of the time, the conservative and liberal alike as a matter of course, and reading the books that are recommended by the more intellectual blogs.

Amazon does a great job with reviews. I say this with the obvious bias of a top Amazon reviewer. My fellow reviewers are a very intellectual bunch, that their takes on the books coming out are pretty well balanced right and left. Amazon reviewers and commenters on books of substance are as intelligent as any group of Internet bloggers that you will find.

Therefore, I would recommend that a reader today periodically Google "Kindle recent releases" or "Kindle coming soon." It gives a thorough overview by category of everything new that's coming out. You will recognize you will get a brief description of the book and the authors. Pay attention to well-known authors. If you see something coming up by Charles Murray, Noam Chomsky or Steven Pinker, take note.

If you don't buy it immediately, a second step would be to wait until the book is issued, read the first reviews, and then decide. Kindle delivers quickly and effortlessly, so shopping is not a problem.

In the course of reading new books, you will often find classical references. For instance, I myself often were refer to [\[\[ASIN:B00MJ5L01C Democracy in America\]\]](#), [\[\[ASIN:0940322811 Letters from Russia\]\]](#), and [\[\[ASIN:0451529065 The Origin of Species\]\]](#).

I love early and mid 20<sup>th</sup> century books such as [\[\[ASIN:B0007DEMKO Evolution and ethics,\]\]](#) and [\[\[ASIN:1933859377 Family and Civilization\]\]](#). Those authors address modern themes, but make rich use of classical references. They lead you to the ancients with whom you must be familiar.

Certain books, whatever their merits, represent turning points in American history. An American should be familiar with *The Feminist Mystique*, *The Kinsey Reports* and *An American Dilemma*.

Most of the classics can be downloaded for free. Alternatively, you can buy them for very little on Kindle to get a more readable format.

And lastly, books of social commentary by such as Joan Didion and Tom Wolfe are both entertaining and profoundly informative about how we got where we are today.

In any case, this is an unparalleled era for the aspiring reader. You only have to want to read.

## Chapter 9 Make America an Idea Again.

Here we come up with the fundamental contradiction in this book. Sasse has been providing advice to individuals – wonderful advice, advice with which nobody can argue.. America is a collective. In his role as a senator he has to guide the collective. There is a question of whether America can be reformed.

Sasse does not address, cannot address, the question of whether or not democracy, that is representative government, can provide the environment in which the individual can best raise his children. The evidence seems to indicate that it cannot, especially in big cities.

Malthus noticed at the beginning of the Industrial Revolution, also [\[\[ASIN:1566631688 Alexis de Tocqueville\]\]](#), that the welfare state decreased the caliber of the citizenry. That is statistically verified today by [\[\[ASIN:0275949176 Richard Lynn\]\]](#) and [\[\[ASIN:B01K9109E6 Helmuth Nyborg\]\]](#). As our societies have become richer and better able to sustain every citizen, the capacity of those citizens, their intellectual engagement and even intellectual ability, has decreased. This is reflected in the dysfunction of our government.

Therefore, the question for an individual should be whether or not democracy matters. It is rather, given that we live in a world sufficiently dysfunctional that we cannot count on democracy to provide the things that the founding fathers expected it to, how can we raise our progeny?

Sasse says he has concerns about three trends

1. The accelerating technologies that are, quite simply, going to make a lot of our current jobs disappear;
2. The coming-of-age crisis that has been the central subject of this book, which I believe has resulted in a generation of kids who will have a tough time dealing with number one, not to mention playing their roles as active, engaged citizens; and
3. The fact that in times of economic disruption, we invariably see the rise of people who offer quick fixes, nativist campaigns, and more centralized power as a way out.

I will add a fourth, which Sasse addresses below. There has been a strong trend against freedom of speech. If citizens no longer dare have an open discussion about issues such as those involving race, gender, immigration and climate change, the country will be unable to even define its problems, much less solve them. He does not mention whether or not his Midland University could invite a speaker with a politically incorrect point of view on any of them. My bet is they could not.

Sasse sees that "The Republic is the only form of government, the only social arrangement, that seeks to make individuals preeminent in their own self-control, their own self-possession. The republic is thus at once liberating and scary. For it both requires and assumes adults, not subjects. And this is a rare state of affairs and political history."

Absolutely true. Sasse has to know that his prescription cannot be fulfilled. What then?

Sasse says "I believe the First Amendment is the beating heart of the American experiment. The First Amendment is a roadmap for how a nation of 320 million people..." But that's not true. First Amendment freedoms are under attack on every front by political correctness. You can't even have an honest debate about sensitive subjects without somebody threatening to punch you. It is even worse in Europe: you can be jailed for Holocaust denial, denial of global warming, or questioning immigration. We are entering a dark age in which it is certainly impolitic and often dangerous to express your opinions. Even in this review, many Amazon readers will call my comments "unhelpful" simply because they touch on the forbidden topic of race. As you look at my 400+ reviews, you will note that such commenters usually offer no discussion, only libel me as a racist and categorize me as a deplorable. I can handle it. I'm retired and living overseas. America, however, cannot survive such attitudes. They devolve into tyranny.

Humanity has survived these dark ages before. I think that a prudent parent, instead of looking wistfully at a better past, should prepare their children for the reality of the future.

This is a wonderfully written chapter, from the heart. In the end, you have to ask, however, "Do I believe it?" If you do believe it, then invest heart and soul in civic activity, and try to improve things. If you don't believe it, you owe it to your children to find some way to escape. Go to Fremont, Nebraska, or perhaps the backwoods of Montana as a survivalist or go someplace overseas where your fellow citizens look like you and the government is too incompetent to interfere with you. Central Europe is great. Argentina, Costa Rica and my Ukraine are good because the government simply does not have the competence, and does not care to intrude on a person's freedom of thought or freedom to raise their children as they wish.

Sasse writes "What makes America great – it's believe in the PTA, the synagogues, the churches, the small businessman businesses in town meetings – all places where free people freely assemble to serve and to build lives together." Yes, that is what made America great. These institutions have been shut down by the courts and crowded out by government. It is not by accident. It is part of the progressive plan, going back to Thomas Dewey. If it can be reversed, great. If not, prepare to find someplace else.

## Sasse's Postscript: Why This Wasn't a Policy Book

1. You can't solve a problem unless you agree on what it is.
2. The problem is upstream of politics.
3. We don't have a menu of policy levers and
4. You can't have a policy discussion against the static backdrop – things are changing constantly.

### My bona fides for commenting on this book

I am four years older than Ben Sasse's father. The children of my first family attended Episcopal schools in Washington DC from 1985 through 2007. I served on the boards, becoming treasurer of both. After retiring, I entered the University of Maryland Graduate School of Education with the intent of learning about teaching. That was a disaster – after a semester I changed my PhD interest to statistics.

We traveled fairly extensively as this family was growing, primarily to Canada, Europe and Latin America. I had previously worked four years in Vietnam and four in Germany, during which time I also traveled a great deal. Along the way I picked up languages, now totaling six.

My millennial children are afflicted by all of the problems that Sasse so well describes. Even ten years ago they were not talking to me and it was clear that they were unlikely to marry successfully or to give me grandchildren. Time has unfortunately not proven me wrong. They have not established careers, don't talk much with their mother or each other, are invisible on social media, and certainly don't want anything to do with the one person from whom they might (wrongly) fear a told-you-so, their father.

Convinced that they were victims of a poisonous zeitgeist and place, and that I could be a successful parent, I divorced at 64, moved to Ukraine, learned Russian and remarried. It is the kind of partnership I had hoped for all along, and we have a very self-confident five-year-old son and a daughter on the way. As I wrote in [[ASIN:B00DL0TF98 my book]], I had intended to homeschool our son, but for the moment it appears he will benefit more from attending first grade in a Ukrainian speaking surrounding. That will cement his third language. He is a social child who is thriving being around other kids in kindergarten. We will continue to assess the balance between his learning and his social development.

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### Notes on - Introduction: My Kids "Need" Air Conditioning

Sasse's experience as President of Midland University led him to organize and articulate his concerns about the millennial generation. They don't know what hardship is. They are not involved – they are passive consumers of, and complainers about, all that is offered them. Their lives revolve around copout devices (my term) such as video games and social media. The children are not involved as meals being cooked, doing housework, or much else.

He writes "since arriving in the Senate in 2015, my colleagues and I have had discussions on many urgent national problems – from healthcare to immigration, from cybersecurity to new job creation. All of the proposed solutions to address these problems are meaningless, though, if we lack an educated, resilient citizenry capable of navigating the increasing complexities of life." Sasse says that he has organized the book around five broad themes (which, incidentally, track with the chapter outline of Part II of the book):

- One. Overcome peer culture.
- Two. Work hard.

Three. Resist consumption.

Four. Travel to experience the difference between "need" and "want".

Five. Become truly literate.

## Chapter 1: Stranded in Neverland.

Sasse starts with a retelling of Peter Pan, in which everybody but Peter eventually grows up.

Adolescence is a new concept. From the Romans through the Renaissance they defined three seven year periods: infancy, childhood, and puberty, then adulthood at 21. Or, a page at 7, a squire at 14 and knight at 21. Sasse says that childhood has been shortened and adulthood postponed, resulting in a long adolescence with no strong expectations it will ever lead to adulthood.

Sasse attributes the change to "five big developments in the United States in the first decades after World War II."

- First is material abundance.
- Second, nobody knows how to produce anymore
- Third nuclear family falling apart.
- Fourth, universal schooling. Nobody knows how it was. Without it,
- Fifth protests movement of the 60s.

He closes "arguably the most fundamental cleavage in American life is between those who came of age after rather than before the baby boom"

Sasse cites the debate in schools that took place about 1900 between the people who wanted to truly educate people in high school and the pragmatists who wanted to simply prepare boatloads of immigrants for the workplace. Diane Ravitch writes the authoritative history in [\[\[ASIN:0743203267 Left Back: A Century of Battles over School Reform\]\]](#).

Sasse says that John Dewey had an oversized impact. Dewey pretended to be totally pragmatic. Sasse writes, on the contrary, that "We are necessarily within arm's length of large questions about whether your kids on their deathbeds will be able to look back on lives oriented toward the good, the true, and the beautiful." A meaningful life cannot ignore the deeper issues.

Sasse writes that we have two views as to how the world is broken – and we all agreed it is. One school says that the corruption originates inside of us, while the other counters that social structures corrupt from outside. He calls them the romantic and the realistic view. Burke would be the prototype of the first point of view. Man is endowed with original sin, and needs society to keep him in line. Rousseau, the original romantic, advocates the second. He said "Man is born free yet everywhere in chains." Sasse talks about Rousseau's book [\[\[ASIN:1512156531 Emile\]\]](#) because it brings up the right issues, even though Sasse disagreed with most of it.

Dewey comes in with a third point of view. Stop debating realism versus romance. His overarching motive seems to have been to have to secure quality universal schooling for everyone. He was a great progressive, wanting to ensure that the flood of immigrants (then, southern and eastern Europeans) were included. Sasse writes "I will argue, even if you share his progressive goals down to the last one, he is responsible for allowing schools to undermine how Americans want to turn children into adults."

## Chapter 2 - From Little Citizens to Baby Einsteins

Sasse talks about the history of work. Up until 150 years ago, you simply did what your parents did. After school became the norm, you would graduate and choose a job that you could expect to hold onto for a lifetime. Up until the 1970s, it was often a job with your hands. That world of lifetime jobs working with your hands is not coming back. Sasse says that just as we need to be preparing our

children for a lifetime of learning and career changes, we are in the process of abandoning them to Neverland, blissfully unaware of their past or their future.

Sasse lists again the eight markers for coming-of-age mentioned in the body of the review. He proposes that losing one's virginity didn't become a marker in the 60s; it had started half a century earlier with cars. That was not my experience. When I was in high school in Berkeley in 1950s, thought we would have wanted it to be otherwise, most of the guys I knew were virgins. The few girls who we knew were not were talked about in whispers.

Back then there was a predictable order in the steps of achieving adulthood. However, we went from 10% of teenagers attending school in the 1890s to more than 75% by 1945. Back when children were expected to work, they were regarded as apprentice workers, not yet experts. Little citizens. Not to be coddled but to be encouraged to continue to contribute more and more.

There was a divide between America and Europe. Sasse contends that in Europe children were already being coddled and protected from an adult responsibility in the 19th century. Sasse lists nine changes of our less intentional approach to shaping our offspring as they come of age.

10. More medication.
11. More screen time: 5 million Americans consume more than 45 hours of video games per week.
12. More pornography
13. More years under mom's roof.
14. Less marriage: The average age at marriage has risen from 22 to 28 since 1950. 20% of all Americans over 25 have always been single. African Americans reject marriage at about twice the rate of whites. Many people simply say that marriage is not important to them.
15. Less religious participation
16. Little citizens no more. Young Americans simply do not know about the country. The NAEP shows that they fall short. As a result, Sasse says their love of country has fallen. I would add to this that what is taught in school makes them reject their nation. The Howard Zinn type of history is poison. This reviewer's three millennial children (b. 1982, 83 and 88) were specifically and extensively taught about the evils committed on the Trail of Tears, at Wounded Knee, by slavery, at Manzanar, and by men against women. This teaching was not offset by anything favorable our straight WASP forebears might have done.

Sasse writes that many of the young find socialism more attractive than capitalism because it sounds better. They have no historical basis for judging. I add from my experience, the children are not taught of the miseries of communism or present-day socialist failures such as Venezuela. As a substitute history teacher in DC private schools I found the socialist worldview pervasive among students. It was even worse at the U of Md. grad school of education.

17. More intellectually fragile. Sasse writes of trigger warnings and safe spaces. All this coddling simply does not prepare them for the workplace. Keeping up with millennial's need for feedback can drive a manager crazy.
18. Softer parenting. This includes helicopter parenting. Parents reduce the kids' initiative. As a professor, Sasse had parents calling him to complain about the kids' grades. He writes extensively about Dr. Spock's impact. Spock' opinions, and those of his acolytes (Sadkers, Alfie Kohn, et. al.) guided the philosophy in the Episcopal schools my kids attended. The other parents, including my wife, bought it all. The result was not good for any of our kids.

As a high school attendance rose from 2% to 75% in 60 years ending in 1950 a new youth culture appeared. The children were unchaperoned and in each other's company. Here I recite my own experience as a high school student in the 1950s. Yes this is true. We had some good give-and-take with the teachers, who remained more professional and engaged than they are today, but we did indeed have our own culture.

Neil Postman says that the disappearance of childhood came pretty much with the advent of television. Previously, children had needed to learn in order to access the secret world of adult knowledge. Now, it simply poured into the living room on the tube. I strongly second this. Born in 1942, I was eight before our family got a TV. I considered Howdy Doody to be puerile and seldom watched. My friends and I spent our afternoons playing in the hills, building dams and chasing lizards. There was a marked change even with my siblings just two and four years younger.

Other significant changes happened between our generations. At my 1960 high school prom the band still played "Blue Moon," "I'm in the Mood for Love" and "Canadian Sunset." Uplifting songs, glorifying love and marriage. Actually, they also played the Perry Como song by that title. Four years changed it to "If you can't be with the one you love, love the one you're with."

The drug scene swept through like a wave. When I experimented with pot in 1962 I felt like a pioneer. By 1964 everybody was talking about it. Two years more and everybody was doing it. When I started, LSD and peyote were not yet illegal and amphetamines were widely prescribed. It was not long before everything was outlawed – and usage nonetheless universal.

Sasse writes that there is a question of what to call these people who are not yet adults. They call them emerging adults, or pre-adulthood, and they say that they are facing a so-called quarter-life crisis in transitioning into adulthood.

In any case, it's a rich country problem. Rich children are not impelled to become adults and they often don't. Living in Ukraine, I see much less of the problem than exists in the United States, but even Ukraine has its "golden youth" who make Facebook posts about their experiences all over the world and appear not to be in the process of preparing for adulthood.

Sasse writes that childhood is no longer very nurturing or goal oriented. Childhood amorously tapers off by the late teens, it is an. It extends between infancy and the age of 25 or 30, interrupted temporarily by the biologically awkwardness of puberty (which is confusingly now arriving 3 to 5 years earlier for girls than historical norms).

Deflecting all blows our kids might experience does them a disservice. We should give them adult responsibilities as they can take them, and let them feel what adulthood is like.

### Chapter 3: More School Isn't Enough

Sasse describes the horrors that his wife found in teaching in a high school. This is worldwide, and has been well described in any number of books. Among those I review are Ravitch, above, and: [\[\[ASIN:0945700040 The Underground History of American Education: A School Teacher's Intimate Investigation Into the Problem of Modern Schooling\]\]](#), [\[\[ASIN:0674018141 Judging School Discipline: The Crisis of Moral Authority\]\]](#), [\[\[ASIN:0226028569 Academically Adrift: Limited Learning on College Campuses\]\]](#), [\[\[ASIN:B00UHOFKMM Deutschland ist auf \(k\)einem guten Weg - Eine gesellschaftspolitische Analyse mit autobiografischen Zügen \(German Edition\)\]\]](#) and [\[\[ASIN:1484873831 The Swedish Story: From extreme experiment to normal nation\]\]](#)

The Dumbest Generation. The Death and Life of the Great American School System.

The problems America has long had in schooling are showing themselves in Europe as well, and for the same reasons. Many of the problems can be honestly addressed, and are, as Ravitch and Gatto do. However, politicians simply cannot afford to speak the truth about the different populations of schoolchildren. Google "Arthur Jensen 1968" to see what happened to one bold soul who tried to do so as far back as fifty years ago. Google "Moynihan Nixon Jensen Herrnstein" for a story of political cowardice – or realism – from that era.

I note that Ukrainian schools, despite all of the problems of lack of resources, probably do a better job of preparing kids. That's because they don't have to worry about social promotion and I don't have to

make worry about making kids feel dumb. The kids are all of the same ethnic background. The dumb ones look just like the smart ones.

Dewey proposed that the school must become the center of the social life of the child. That meant that it displaced other institutions that might have served that role – church, scouts, athletics and family. Dewey appears to have been an early skeptic of "drill and kill," an opponent of rote learning and too much reading. I note that my elementary teachers in the 1940s felt no qualms about making me learn my times tables. My millennial children, in expensive private schools, did not. They still can't manage arithmetic easily.

My observation is that children learn from people they respect – smart people. Schools often don't put smart people in the classroom. Nor could they, for the salaries we pay and the obstacles they put the way of conscientious teachers. Sasse says that we need to replace or fix the entire system. He is absolutely right. However, that would be impossible. It has far too big of a political constituency. More than that, too few people demand quality. Sasse himself has chosen the right approach: home schooling. It is especially important when he lives in Washington DC, which is riven by a diverse population. (NB: I was a parent, teacher and trustee in DC private schools – see the comment on my own experience and qualifications). He is fortunate to have a place he belongs, Fremont, Neb, populated by family and people like himself. I had none of that in Washington D.C. It is one of the things I treasure about raising my second family in Kiev.

With regard to letting kids learn by experience, Sasse offers a typically (wrong) point of view: "Young adults cannot be expected to know or understand the full ramifications of their roles in the economy without close guidance, particularly in the early years of their careers." wrote Matthew Lynch, a Virginia education expert. That is absolute nonsense. They have to learn as they go.

Sasse writes in a section entitled "Learn how to learn."

We need to recognize the importance of the trivium, which would be grammar, dialectic and rhetoric. We need to learn how to organize and present thoughts. The oral is increasingly important. In my childhood it was written, because people read newspapers and books. In this day and age, the written is important, but we have to re-recognize the fact that most people deal with media. Question for you, my reader. How many people will ever read this comment? You are right: very few, but quite bright. If I want to make a difference I should have a video on Facebook or YouTube, or a Ted Talk. NB: I do that on climate. Google "graham seibert global warming."

Sasse goes into the active / passive aspect of education. Teachers I know call it The Dixie cup model. Open the kid's head and pour in knowledge. It is backwards. The true model is, "students learn," not "teachers teach."

Commenting on the passive model Gatto writes: "The main consequences for students are: emotional confusion, social class disparity, indifference, passivity, intellectual dependency on experts, conditional self-esteem, and surveillance by those in charge."

We can never accept Moynihan and Jensen's (above) observations as a basis for framing public school policy because they would be denounced as racist. We might tackle it from a different direction. Go with the tenor of the times and allow every little group to do its own educational thing. Celebrate diversity in education. Let Jews raise their kids according to a Jewish pattern. Let Chinese to raise their kids by a Chinese pattern. Let Black parents raise their kids to be Black. I note that some of the most enthusiastic home schoolers in Washington and Baltimore are successful, predominantly intact Black families who have given up on the public schools. If such ventures succeed, eventually white parents might be left alone to raise their kids to be who they are. But don't hold your breath.

As an aside, a strong indicator of the value of home schooling is that it is against the law in Sweden and Germany. They do not allow parents any way out of enforced multiculturalism, and the school

system that results from it. For a good, albeit dated assessment see [[ASIN:0674010531 Diversity in America: Keeping Government at a Safe Distance]]. Read also "The Swedish Story," link provided above.

One thing that Sasse doesn't state but is inherently obvious is the need for her mother and father to be working as a team. If the couple is not in agreement, they default to letting the government choose the curriculum, the pacing, and the content (viz, sex education) that their children will experience. Parents do a better job.

## Part II: An Active Program

Having outlined the problems in Part I, Sasse gives his own advice, not as a public office holder but as a parent and educator. He gives five pieces of advice, character building habits that will prepare children for the many diverse stages of life that lie ahead. These track the five chapters to follow:

First, breaking free of the tyranny of one generation.

Second, develop a work ethic.

Third embrace limited consumption

Fourth learn how to travel and travel light.

Fifth, learn how to read and decide what to read.

## Chapter 4: Four: Flee Age Segregation

We are very self-segregating by age. We go by birth cohort through the schools and we likewise go by cohorts into senior citizens homes. Sasse talks about death and confronting the reality of our mortality, facing it bravely. Also about our tendency to deny aging. Sasse talks about sex. He observes that to talk only about the act, the pleasure, diminishes it and leaves it hollow. Unfortunately that is what we do with the schools. While they can't teach things of substance, they spread a secular message that sex is nothing more than the act.

There is a relationship between monogamy and happiness in general, he quotes. This is truer for women than men. And this is probably because monogamous couples are not looking for more in sex than can be found. They look for their happiness, their fulfillment and other things. He talks about the reality of birth, and the profound feeling of being there at birth.

He writes about the "Three purposes of sex: First, from an anthropological or Judeo-Christian standpoint, sex has always been seen as a covenant initiation and a covenant renewal ceremony. Fundamentally, the act of the flesh of two different people becoming one has been to say, in effect, that they are engaged in a unique relationship, one that is different from all others. They are now intimates." "Sex's second purpose is procreation, and its third is pleasure."

## Five: Embrace Work Pain

This chapter is about the work ethic. It starts with an account of his grandmother running a farm all by herself when his grandfather was often the war. A formative experience for Sasse was five years in charge of Midland University. He discovered that most of the students simply had no work ethic and no work experience. They consider themselves to be highly entitled consumers and had no sense of that personal responsibility in doing things. He writes "Although it is not universally fair, millennials have acquired a collective reputation as needy, undisciplined, coddled, presumptuous, lacking much of a filter between their public personas in their inner lives. As one New York Times story about millennials in the workplace put it, managers struggle with their young employees 'sense of entitlement, a tendency to overshare on social media, and frankness verging on insubordination.'"

"Our students coming-of-age crisis is not limited to lacking self-restraint, but more broadly reflects that they do not understand what self-restraint is, and why is necessary for them individually, and why they should be frightened at our lack of it, collectively." Sasse describes his own first jobs in rural



Nebraska – walking beans and tasseling corn. Tough work, work was physically hard and unpleasant and that tassels of the corn would give you corn rash.

## Chapter 6 Consume Less.

Sasse talks quotes Arthur Brooks, president of the American Enterprise Institute, saying that half of happiness is genetic – you can't influence that. This is widely known. [\[\[ASIN:0965683621 Phillipe Rushton\]\]](#) is among many who have written on its heritability. Another quarter is simply avoiding the horrific events such as war, famine epidemic. But the last quarter is under our control. Therefore, Sasse enumerates the drivers of happiness: faith, family, community, and work. After noticing that these quite closely paralleled Charles Murray's [\[\[ASIN:030745343X Coming Apart: The State of White America, 1960-2010\]\]](#), he immediately quoted Murray.

Another expert, Gretchen Rubin, suggests that our habits and our self-mastery must determine whether we will build and strengthen those essential relationships with spouse, children, and neighbors.

Sasse cites Christian Smith's book [\[\[ASIN:0199828024 Lost in Transition: The Dark Side of Emerging Adulthood\]\]](#). The kids – generation Z and the millennials – are materialistic and are unreflexive about the fact that they are materialistic. There is no introspection. Sasse paraphrases Thomas Hobbes, saying that prior to agriculture life was nasty, brutish and short. (Note that not all agree – see [\[\[ASIN:147292293X Built on Bones: 15,000 Years of Urban Life and Death\]\]](#). But society certainly did become denser and the societies pulled themselves together into specialized work categories.)

Sasse next talks about how the deforestation of England pushed the search for an alternate fuel, which turned out to be coal. That inspired the industrial age. In the industrial age has been running ever since, making us richer and richer generation after generation. Until now.

Up until the industrial revolution, most people were generalists, producing almost everything they needed. Now, most of us have become specialists. Sasse says that by 1830s and 1840s, Americans were no longer living on the edge. They could not by and large be wiped out by a single bad harvest or bad winter. Consumerism started. There was a fashion revolution in clothing. No longer just what you needed but what you could afford to buy.

Problems cropped up. The boom and bust cycles were ruinous. Thousands of farmers were done in, not by the weather, but the banks. Conspicuous consumption was coined as a term in the 1890s and it flowered in America with mass production. Want seems to have triumphed over need.

We need some stoicism, needs to forget about consumerism. Stoicism represents self-discipline and brings happiness. Consumerism does not.

We need to consume less, not less. Make do with cold showers. Not bitch when the electricity is off or the water heater is out or the bus is not running. We must learn to be tough.

## Chapter 7 Travel to See

There is a story about how his father in his buddies would go off into the wilds of Canada and the 1960s, just after finals and go fishing, living off the land. Ben did the same thing, although not as extravagantly. But the key thing that is that he and his buddies went alone with no other adults on the trip. They planned it, and they did it themselves. They were self-sufficient.

Sasse is against consumer tourism. If you let a tour guide do it, you'll see the tourist attractions and not the country itself. Sasse contends that a traveler is active, the tourist is passive.

He offers excellent advice. Prepare for your trip by reading up on your destination and if possible learning the language. Travel light and live off the land – you will learn more. Stay in places where the natives stay and travel on trains and buses they use. You will meet far more people.

The best travel I did with growing children was through home exchanges, bike trips and Habitat for Humanity. The home exchange puts you in a neighborhood and gives you a car to see the countryside. Play with local kids in the pool, eat and shop where the locals do. The bicycling vacation gives the kids exercise and a chance to see a foreign country without a windshield in the way. And Habitat for Humanity gives them a chance to do something physical, which Sasse and I would agree is essential. Go on a Habitat trip and be prepared to be ashamed of how incompetent your fellow Americans are at simple tasks like digging with a shovel, hammering nails and cutting rebar. If you can prepare your kids by teaching them these things, they will (rather, should – I never succeeded) glow with pride at being able to keep up with the natives. Then ask them to reflect how it is that these very competent people have incomes of less than 5% of American families. It is sobering.

Chapter Eight: Build a Bookshelf

Sasse advocates extensive reading. The question is, what.

The canon, the Harvard Classics or Great Books series, are a thing of the past. Although they are well worth reading, they address the great ideas of all history, they will not resonate with your kids' peers – or even your own. In other words, your kid will simply find nobody to discuss Thucydides, Gibbon, or even Ariel and Will Durant with. What people will have read, and what can be discussed, are more recent books. I would advocate starting with more accessible texts and working backwards. As you encounter classical references, write them down and make a point of reading those classics. I would advocate following our leading blogs of the time, the conservative and liberal alike as a matter of course, and reading the books that are recommended by the more intellectual blogs.

Amazon does a great job with reviews. I say this with the obvious bias of a top Amazon reviewer. My fellow reviewers are a very intellectual bunch, that their takes on the books coming out are pretty well balanced right and left. Amazon reviewers and commenters on books of substance are as intelligent as any group of Internet bloggers that you will find.

Therefore, I would recommend that a reader today periodically Google "Kindle recent releases" or "Kindle coming soon." It gives a thorough overview by category of everything new that's coming out. You will recognize you will get a brief description of the book and the authors. Pay attention to well-known authors. If you see something coming up by Charles Murray, Noam Chomsky or Steven Pinker, take note.

If you don't buy it immediately, a second step would be to wait until the book is issued, read the first reviews, and then decide. Kindle delivers quickly and effortlessly, so shopping is not a problem.

In the course of reading new books, you will often find classical references. For instance, I myself often were refer to [\[\[ASIN:B00MJ5L01C Democracy in America\]\]](#), [\[\[ASIN:0940322811 Letters from Russia\]\]](#), and [\[\[ASIN:0451529065 The Origin of Species\]\]](#).

I love early and mid 20<sup>th</sup> century books such as [\[\[ASIN:B0007DEMKO Evolution and ethics,\]\]](#) and [\[\[ASIN:1933859377 Family and Civilization\]\]](#). Those authors address modern themes, but make rich use of classical references. They lead you to the ancients with whom you must be familiar.

Certain books, whatever their merits, represent turning points in American history. An American should be familiar with *The Feminist Mystique*, *The Kinsey Reports* and *An American Dilemma*.

Most of the classics can be downloaded for free. Alternatively, you can buy them for very little on Kindle to get a more readable format.

And lastly, books of social commentary by such as Joan Didion and Tom Wolfe are both entertaining and profoundly informative about how we got where we are today.

In any case, this is an unparalleled era for the aspiring reader. You only have to want to read.

Chapter 9 Make America an Idea Again.

Here we come up with the fundamental contradiction in this book. Sasse has been providing advice to individuals – wonderful advice, advice with which nobody can argue.. America is a collective. In his role as a senator he has to guide the collective. There is a question of whether America can be reformed.

Sasse does not address, cannot address, the question of whether or not democracy, that is representative government, can provide the environment in which the individual can best raise his children. The evidence seems to indicate that it cannot, especially in big cities.

Malthus noticed at the beginning of the Industrial Revolution, also [\[\[ASIN:1566631688 Alexis de Tocqueville\]\]](#), that the welfare state decreased the caliber of the citizenry. That is statistically verified today by [\[\[ASIN:0275949176 Richard Lynn\]\]](#) and [\[\[ASIN:B01K9109E6 Helmuth Nyborg\]\]](#). As our societies have become richer and better able to sustain every citizen, the capacity of those citizens, their intellectual engagement and even intellectual ability, has decreased. This is reflected in the dysfunction of our government.

Therefore, the question for an individual should be whether or not democracy matters. It is rather, given that we live in a world sufficiently dysfunctional that we cannot count on democracy to provide the things that the founding fathers expected it to, how can we raise our progeny?

Sasse says he has concerns about three trends

4. The accelerating technologies that are, quite simply, going to make a lot of our current jobs disappear;
5. The coming-of-age crisis that has been the central subject of this book, which I believe has resulted in a generation of kids who will have a tough time dealing with number one, not to mention playing their roles as active, engaged citizens; and
6. The fact that in times of economic disruption, we invariably see the rise of people who offer quick fixes, nativist campaigns, and more centralized power as a way out.

I will add a fourth, which Sasse addresses below. There has been a strong trend against freedom of speech. If citizens no longer dare have an open discussion about issues such as those involving race, gender, immigration and climate change, the country will be unable to even define its problems, much less solve them. He does not mention whether or not his Midland University could invite a speaker with a politically incorrect point of view on any of them. My bet is they could not.

Sasse sees that "The Republic is the only form of government, the only social arrangement, that seeks to make individuals preeminent in their own self-control, their own self-possession. The republic is thus at once liberating and scary. For it both requires and assumes adults, not subjects. And this is a rare state of affairs and political history."

Absolutely true. Sasse has to know that his prescription cannot be fulfilled. What then?

Sasse says "I believe the First Amendment is the beating heart of the American experiment. The First Amendment is a roadmap for how a nation of 320 million people..." But that's not true. First Amendment freedoms are under attack on every front by political correctness. You can't even have an honest debate about sensitive subjects without somebody threatening to punch you. It is even worse in Europe: you can be jailed for Holocaust denial, denial of global warming, or questioning immigration. We are entering a dark age in which it is certainly impolitic and often dangerous to express your opinions. Even in this review, many Amazon readers will call my comments "unhelpful"

simply because they touch on the forbidden topic of race. As you look at my 400+ reviews, you will note that such commenters usually offer no discussion, only libel me as a racist and categorize me as a deplorable. I can handle it. I'm retired and living overseas. America, however, cannot survive such attitudes. They devolve into tyranny.

Humanity has survived these dark ages before. I think that a prudent parent, instead of looking wistfully at a better past, should prepare their children for the reality of the future.

This is a wonderfully written chapter, from the heart. In the end, you have to ask, however, "Do I believe it?" If you do believe it, then invest heart and soul in civic activity, and try to improve things. If you don't believe it, you owe it to your children to find some way to escape. Go to Fremont, Nebraska, or perhaps the backwoods of Montana as a survivalist or go someplace overseas where your fellow citizens look like you and the government is too incompetent to interfere with you. Central Europe is great. Argentina, Costa Rica and my Ukraine are good because the government simply does not have the competence, and does not care to intrude on a person's freedom of thought or freedom to raise their children as they wish.

Sasse writes "What makes America great – it's believe in the PTA, the synagogues, the churches, the small businessman businesses in town meetings – all places where free people freely assemble to serve and to build lives together." Yes, that is what made America great. These institutions have been shut down by the courts and crowded out by government. It is not by accident. It is part of the progressive plan, going back to Thomas Dewey. If it can be reversed, great. If not, prepare to find someplace else.

Sasse's Postscript: Why This Wasn't a Policy Book

5. You can't solve a problem unless you agree on what it is.
6. The problem is upstream of politics.
7. We don't have a menu of policy levers and
8. You can't have a policy discussion against the static backdrop – things are changing constantly.

My bona fides for commenting on this book

I am four years older than Ben Sasse's father. The children of my first family attended Episcopal schools in Washington DC from 1985 through 2007. I served on the boards, becoming treasurer of both. After retiring, I entered the University of Maryland Graduate School of Education with the intent of learning about teaching. That was a disaster – after a semester I changed my PhD interest to statistics.

We traveled fairly extensively as this family was growing, primarily to Canada, Europe and Latin America. I had previously worked four years in Vietnam and four in Germany, during which time I also traveled a great deal. Along the way I picked up languages, now totaling six.

My millennial children are afflicted by all of the problems that Sasse so well describes. Even ten years ago they were not talking to me and it was clear that they were unlikely to marry successfully or to give me grandchildren. Time has unfortunately not proven me wrong. They have not established careers, don't talk much with their mother or each other, are invisible on social media, and certainly don't want anything to do with the one person from whom they might fear a told-you-so, their father.

Convinced that they were victims of a poisonous zeitgeist and place, and that I could be a successful parent, I divorced at 64, moved to Ukraine, learned Russian and remarried. It is the kind of partnership I had hoped for all along, and we have a very self-confident five-year-old son and a daughter on the way. As I wrote in [\[\[ASIN:B00DL0TF98 my book\]\]](#), I had intended to homeschool our son, but for the moment it appears he will benefit more from attending first grade in a Ukrainian

speaking surrounding. That will cement his third language. He is a social child who is thriving being around other kids in kindergarten. We will continue to assess the balance between his learning and his social development.