

*The Upswing: How America Came Together a Century Ago and How We Can Do It Again*, Robert D. Putnam with Shaylyn Romney Garrett (2020, Simon & Schuster)

What do wages, split ticket voting, baby-names, club membership, philanthropy, marriage rates, congressional voting, unionization, and pronoun usage have in common? Between 1890 and the present they first showed a consistent movement toward economic equality, political consensus, civic engagement, family formation, widespread philanthropy, and cultural solidarity, and then, in the later sixties, pivoted toward the economic disparity, political and social polarization, general mistrust of government and institutions, and cultural dissonance that we suffer today. Putnam and Garrett call this the I-we-I curve, and using hundreds of sources of data, they back up every generalization with solid evidence.

I believe that this is an important book. It puts many events and cultural phenomena we all remember in a wider chronological framework, and disproves many accepted ideas about what happened and when. It has important things to say about the fight for women's rights and also about the key role of race relations in political compromise and political enmity. Strikingly, it shows that changes in the economy were more the *effect* of changed ideas than the cause of them. By demonstrating that great improvements became possible because of grass roots beliefs and activity, not simply by virtue of legislation and presidential initiatives, it gives us hope that what people like us do all over the country now can put us back on the path to "we." Although one might question the relationship between some of the data and the things they're said to point to, in aggregate, they offer convincing proof of the book's conclusions.

*The Upswing* is clearly written and clearly organized and not at all technical, and excluding the footnotes, it's only 341 pages long. However, you need to be prepared for a slog. This is not a book to take to the proverbial beach. It's straight exposition, with quite a few charts, and almost no stories. But if you venture to begin, I think you will be constantly surprised by the evidence Putnam and Garrett present, and will find your view of the past subtly changed and your view of the future more positive.