Recent American Stupidity

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The New Deal: In the early 1930’s, Americans did not perceive giant business organizations as “Governing bodies” but as eminently successful rugged individuals. Another part of American fiction was that the nominal government in Washington had some kind of power to control events and the knowledge to do so beneficially. Actually, a private organization determined the daily life of the average citizen—when to get up in the morning, what to eat, what to wear, what working conditions would be and how leisure time would be spent. FDR changed all that. The government now goes beyond just governing. However ineffective it may be, the bureaucracy attempts to control us and virtually every aspect of our daily lives.

The other big change in thinking—i.e., a paradigm shift—which occurred during the 1930’s was that the “People” were mixed into the Government=Business equation. All the regulations which had been cultivated by the business community to harness government to the promotion and development of corporations were converted into mechanisms of government regulation over the industrial complex. The change occurred for the best of reasons—it had to. The business community had been granted the license to run itself and the country into the ground and then had proceeded to do precisely that.

Had necessity not been quite so compelling at the time, Americans would have been more reluctant than they were to convert from worshiping big business to worshiping big government. Rituals and jargon all favored the status morbus. The only problem was pragmatic—the system did not work. Of course, nothing the befuddled New Dealers did for eight years worked very effectively either until World War II bailed the country out of the Depression.

In a general and abstract sense, the New Deal amounted to an admission that the old beliefs in capitalism and the mechanisms by which business controlled politics worked to everyone’s worst interest.
The new, emerging schema was based on belief in legislation designed to help people by limiting business. Unfortunately, the pragmatic result of FDR’s effort to surpass Wilson’s progressive warfare state was not government by law but by organization. Although the underlying principles upon which government is based may be theoretically sound, human organizations take on selfserving lives of their own. Hence, the efforts to realize our ideals by legislating control resulted in strangling business with fascistic regulations, but the president’s efforts were appreciated by some: in 1934, an expression of admiration for his “Successful battle against economic distress” was received from none other than financial analyst Adolf Hitler.

If the preoccupation here with systems and principles seems out of place, it nevertheless reflects the prevailing attitude of those who lived through the American Reformation of the 1930’s. During the Depression, people who had gone bankrupt commonly spent their working lives trying to pay off their creditors. Few groups received or even sought handouts from the government. Mostly, they were seeking explanations—new ideologies (Socialism, Communism, Fascism) to replace the ragged individualism created and dragged gullibly into disrepute by capitalism. Very few people with any articulate political force actually demanded bread instead of the alphabet circuses of the New Deal.

In one of the few intellectual ironies of the 1930’s, while the people were looking for reassuring answers to theoretical questions, their leader was searching for practical, pragmatic solutions to real economic problems. As an inveterate non-ideologue, President Roosevelt was a pragmatic empiricist committed to trying one thing after another in a hit and miss fashion until he found something (i.e., WWII) that worked. Systematics aside, the government’s perceptible slide toward a fascistically controlled superstate was not well received by conservatives who clung to the belief that the cure for the crisis created by big business was big business as usual. With much righteous hand wringing and expressions of concern about the downfall of laissez faire capitalism, they feared the destruction of individual initiative and the ruin of national character, which they got, but that was the psycho/social price of saving the economic system which was kaputt. How anyone could have missed the fact that capitalism if not corporatism was already down and out can be attributed only to the incredible power of the “Laissez unfair” schema to prevent awareness of the most obvious facts of failing economic life.

The official response was big government, but unofficially, Americans redefined themselves and turned in the tarnished idol of the brazen individual seeking opportunity for that of the cautious conformist seeking security. The resultant welfare programs may have been a boon to civil service bureaucracies, but recipients of the dole, for some unexpected reason, seem to have lost a general sense of social responsibility. As irresponsibility was not the intended goal but an undesired side effect of the welfare state, it was unanticipated by those who approved and those who administered the programs. The subtlety that people given the means for subsistence tend to lose respect for everything including themselves was lost on everyone. However, after eighty years of experience with dependence on the dole, we are beginning to realize that the quest for economic security has indeed undermined our sense of individual responsibility, increased dependency, broken up families and destroyed selfrespect. Physical security in our cities is subject to the irresponsible whims of vandals and hooligans showing their unbridled disrespect for property and human life.

Not only have we redefined ourselves, but we are continually in the process of redefining if not flat outright abusing our language. Is there not something inherently unsettling about a President referring to a nuclear missile as a “Peacekeeper”? Equally odd was Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger’s reference to the Marines’ withdrawal from Lebanon in 1984 as...
"Redeployment" after the nuisance of their presence made them a threat to no one but themselves. One wonders if a person who confuses retreat with redeployment should be in charge of "Peacekeepers". After all, what would happen if he were to "Evaluate" one of them?

Advertising: In a lighter vein, the Attorney General of New York in 1977 put a halt to an advertisement for the sale of "Grass". The ad read: Marijuana cannot be sold through the mail but "grass" can... People were sending in money and getting exactly what was promised—lawn cuttings. Now, that is not the funny part. The funny part is that the ad was stopped because it was considered false advertising although it probably was one of the most honest ads ever placed, but in a world of phonies and scams, nothing is so disturbing and disruptive as the truth.

Beyond exaggeration, however, nothing matches the advertisers' code which in days past prohibited showing people drinking alcoholic beverages. People were shown having a wonderful time pouring beer or wine into their glasses. They sniffed. They smiled. Suddenly, a moose was running through a forest. Then the glasses were half empty and the people were beaming delightedly. This is obviously a silly compromise for advertisers who wanted to promote sales of these products (and distilled spirits as well) without being responsible for the effects of their consumption.

The Media: As amusing and innocent as this example may be, there is a sinister side to the deliberate control and manipulation of information by the media. In totalitarian states, the government uses mind control to maintain belief in the leaders. In America, the media are businesses committed to maintaining belief in the sponsors. Information which is acceptable to advertisers is presented in a manner calculated to make money by increasing circulation or ratings. If this tends to make material superficial, it is because the people will tune out anything which turns them off. To counter this factor, the media promote the cherry picking of a story to emphasize anything salacious which will hold the consumers' attention.

Actually, the history of modern communications generally has been a story of misleading more and more people faster and faster. Television, especially, can amplify and quickly spread all kinds of errors and false impressions most of them contrived to keep the viewer tuned in for further misinformation. Usually just enough reality filters through the smoke to make some prudes scream "Bad taste" but not so much that the public would be revolted by the disaster of the day on the news or the violent climax of a movie or crime drama.

The media's compromise of keeping the public semi-informed is challenged every four years when pollsters make projections of the Presidential elections. In 1980, they forecast a tight race even though they knew days before the election that Reagan would win handily. Their rationale for misrepresenting their findings was that they did not want to cause a landslide for the Republicans. One must wonder just what they were doing or supposed to be doing. If it was going to be a big win for Reagan, was there something wrong with saying so? Were they making data available to the public? Misleading the public? Presenting or hiding results? Just what criteria are used to determine what the public will be told? Election night returns and projections of winners now present problems of national importance, and the public will be informed as to what is happening if and when the media are ready to do so.

The more responsible media tend to be very self-conscious about the effects their news and other fictional stories will have on the public and may present material for the sake of desired effect rather than simply because it is relevant and important. The initial skyjacking stories, for example, seemed to induce more skyjacking. This presented news editors with a dilemma. Reporting the news in a straightforward fashion put people in jeopardy. It simply would not do for the TV networks to inform the public about...
skyjackings so that the people could decide what to do about them themselves. The bottom line is that part of the role of the media is to keep voters in a democratic society uninformed and misinformed as they pliantly elect officials and accept establishment programs and policies. The Los Angeles Times from the second decade of the 20th century onwards provided an embarrassing example of this principle: it was in no way a chronicle of the city’s growth but blatantly a tool of the entrenchment.

It is in the interest of the monied powers in America that the public be informed just enough to conform, that beliefs in the system are confirmed and that criticism is trivialized. Basically, leaders need stupid followers. They do not want intelligent, informed, concerned citizens who are well qualified to criticize the imbalance of power in society. Stability is promoted by a compliant, semiinformed public, and this exactly what the educational institutions produce and the media maintain.

Politics: This point is dramatically demonstrated during political campaigns. Increasingly, elections are decided by 30 second spot ads aimed more at the gut than the mind—commercial techniques of imagemaking which pervert the process into a popularity contest. Negative campaigning against the opponent aside, the fundamental idiocy of electioneering is that it is largely unrelated to the qualifications and abilities an official needs for performing his/her duties once elected. That is, a candidate may be chosen on the basis of attributes irrelevant to job performance. An administrator has to be organized and make decisions, yet he/she might be elected because of a winning smile. It is apparently too much to expect that our political leaders might be selected for job related skills. Increasingly, the ability to look and act the part is eclipsing the ability play the role as a qualification for attaining office. Worse yet, permanent campaigning by officials and candidates like Donald Trump has come to mean “Looking the part” is the job. We can hope only that the system will somehow be able to produce as many worthy leaders as it managed to do in the past.

The pragmatic compromise which American political institutions have found expedient to make is one of trading off logical consistency for responsiveness to popular demands. It is much more important that governments and parties be sensitive to the general public or their own members than that they adhere to set policies and eternal principles. American “Democracy” has been redefined and adapted to a republic. The people make essentially no decisions except to choose representatives to play “Let’s Make a Deal” with the lobbyists for special interest groups. In the new sense of the term, a “Democracy” is a political system which cultivates good relations with its subject people. Thus, America maintains the semblance of a democratic tradition, in that the people are periodically consulted and occasionally considered while being deliberately misinformed by “Ins” determined to get reelected and the “Outs” dedicated to impairing the system and blaming the “Ins” so they themselves can get in and do the same.

Hence, the basic myth about American government—the belief that it is working for the people. This is the root cause of much political stupidity. Two hundred years ago, this notion might have been amusing, but reality has long since supplied ample, dispelling evidence that, in fact, the people are working for the government. The average American works until Apr. 18th to pay their federal taxes—then he works another nineteen days to pay for his food. This the average American boob does despite the growing realization most governmental agencies are working for themselves rather than the poor tax payer. Cabinet members use issues as levers to aid them as they jockey for position in the “Power Stakes”. Congressmen logroll to their mutual advantage and the detriment of everyone else. Boondoggle begets boondoggle, and governmental stupidity becomes a mixture of departmental ineptitude compounded by the noise and friction of competitive haggling among the many bureaucratic agencies.
Whether this is really stupid or not depends upon one's perspective. However, in politics, power defines perspectives. As a repository of power, government is clearly a means which has become an end in itself. Although the original idea was that the government was to help the people realize themselves, it has indulged in a tradition of making and interpreting its own laws in self-serving ways. Government has emerged supreme and extreme. It is strangling the people it was designed to serve and who continually struggle to support it. It is no surprise that the originally religious faith in our parasitic political system has been eroded: the surprise for all but students of stupidity is that there is any left at all.

Generally, the religious fervor that was once inspired by democratic terminology has been badly compromised by pragmatism: "Liberty" is hardly worth killing for these days and certainly not worth dying for. If democratic slogans have ceased to be accepted as inspiring truths, now that we have endured over a century of hacks running the political machines, there is some consolation in knowing that bribery and corruption have become more refined and discreet. Aside from the Nixonians (who were justly punished as warnings to others not to get caught), we now have a higher sleaze of political crooks. They are slicker, subtler and more sophisticated than before and quite capable of providing the modern public with both the image and reality expected and needed.

Stupidity becomes apparent, however, whenever the discrepancy between image and reality bends or stretches credulity beyond the breaking point. For example, for years the federal government indulged in a Soil Bank program, paying farmers to reduce food production while people all over the world and even in this country were starving to death. Why that same money was not paid to farmers to grow food which then could have been distributed (along with contraceptives) to the impoverished needy remains a mystery. It need be explained only if people realize how stupid it was for a government to prevent food production in a world of famine and an era when America was presenting itself to the world as a national embodiment of Christian ideals and compassion.

Slightly more idiotic than the Soil Bank program are the policies in Washington toward tobacco. This is a substance recognized as a poison by everyone but those controlled by it. Yet, because of the political clout of the tobacco states on Congressional committees, the government supports the price of tobacco. Then it taxes cigarettes, which, it assures us, menace our health. Just why tobacco farmers cannot grow food, which would help people live, is more a matter of money than morals. As it was, from 1955 to 1975, America enjoyed seven million tobacco-related deaths while the industry to in $200 billion in revenues—or $28,500/death. An obvious victim of oxymoronic political morality was the Constitutional mandate that the government promote the general welfare of the people.

Even stupider than the government's policies toward tobacco is its ongoing policy toward drugs: Federal drug laws were denounced as a disaster in 1993 but continue ineffectually to date. Forty-three years and $260 billion after the current War on Drugs began, American society is still inundated by cocaine and heroin, or, to put it another way, the drugs are winning. Increasingly, it is becoming obvious that we will never lick the drug problem as long as we deal with it as criminal behavior. There is simply too much money available to corrupt any efforts to put an end to drug dealing. The only way to win the war on drugs is to legalize their use and deal with the whole matter as a problem of health. Users could then go to physicians, enroll in rehabilitation programs and get prescriptions for their needs which could be filled at prices so low that the drug cartels could not compete. Until we adopt such a strategy, the drug problem will remain no matter how much money the government throws at it. Only when we legalize drugs will the problem disappear. Of course, the main stumbling block to adopting this policy is primarily psychological—we would have to change our
drugrelated schema so that we would perceive a moderate user as someone who should be left alone, like the moderate drinker, and the addict not as a criminal but, like the alcoholic, a person who needs structured help in finding treatment and, hopefully, a cure.

It is rather sad to note that nothing makes government look stupider than an objective recitation of official acts and policies. Much as people need to believe in the system, they find it difficult to worship an organization which insults their fading mental sensibilities as it pours their tax dollars down one bottomless rat hole after another. Our current crusade to represent the "Under privileged person" as a cause célèbre in our political conscience is a case in point. Helping people help themselves is one thing, but the goal of making everyone equally privileged is so asinine that only a democratic government could embrace and only a totalitarian government (Ephesia?) could achieve it. While handouts and doles are worthy shortterm, emergency measures, they have now become standards in a culture which accepts emergency conditions as normal thus inducing more emergencies. Big government is promoted but the establishment of effective, longterm solutions to our social problems are thwarted by the institution of such desperate programs, which foster not independent human development but human dependence on selfperpetuating bureaucracies.

The functional guiding principle of administrating is quite simple—offend as few powerful people as possible while placating as many as possible. Thus, when a decision is made by a civil servant, the prime concerns are covering his ass and the satisfaction of the noisiest and most influential pressure group. Other factors which enter into the decisionmaking process are 1.) advancement of the decider up the pecking order, 2.) thwarting interdepartmental rivals, and 3.) facts relevant to the particular problem at hand. If public interests happen to be served by such officials, that is only because they happen to fall in line with these criteria deemed crucial by those laboring in the context of the bureaucracy.

In public service, employees and officials routinely find that institutional stupidity makes their jobs (i.e., helping tax paying citizens) all the more difficult. Organizational guidelines take on lives of their own and inhibit the even wellintentioned workers from accomplishing their appointed tasks. Hospital personnel spend as much time filling out forms as tending to patients. School teachers spend one or two class periods a day administrating or patrolling rather than teaching. The military cannot win a war because the weapons or tactics necessary to do so would create "Bad press".

Another factor contributing to the frustration of goal achievement is the excess of information available to anyone who wants to be confused. Understanding is rendered unlikely when a person is inundated by masses of conflicting data. A common ploy under such circumstances is to make no decision but to stick with existing policy regardless of complaints or reports of its shortcomings and failings. Repetition of just what was once acceptable provides citizens with government by inertia.

A further impediment to goal achievement is that those effecting policy would rather perpetuate errors than admit to making them. Of course, this strategy has the advantage of saving those in charge the bother of correcting or eliminating such mistakes as do exist. Unfortunately, the Veterans Administration provided a rather sad example of what this can mean to victims of government bureaucracy. In its own hospitals, the VA often failed to enforce its own safety standards and failed to follow its own lax rules for investigating patient death rates. Further, VA consultants were quite content to push paper around instead of demanding an end to dangerous conditions that were causing needless deaths early in the 1980’s. This indifference allowed the perpetuation of a venerable tradition of surgical errors. Worse yet, all this was made probable by the 1980 Congressional Invitation to Ineptitude Act which made reports dealing with the quality of VA medical care confidential. Fortunately, by the start of the 21st century, VA hospitals
became very much reformed and led the nation in quality medical care until the numbers of patients from the wars in the MidEast overwhelmed they system in the early 21st century resulting in admissions delays to treatment programs of dubious quality.41

For as long as they could, until the story broke in the press, those on the inside, from the clearly criminal to the merely contemptuous, protected themselves. Although all public officials must occasionally reward meritorious service, they also strive to cover up mistakes and encourage conformity to mediocre standards for the sake of the esprit de corps. Just so they all feel they belong, the dull are promoted and the bright discouraged from competence or from setting examples of excellence that others might resent. The danger of all such institutional stupidity is that it passes unrecognized as such within the system and becomes a new and lower standard for judging the acceptability of dubious conduct.

However, it was hardly dubious for the VA falsely to declare Jerry Miller of Palm Bay, Florida dead four times in two years. “To me, it’s stupid”, he preposthumously averred, but it is not unique. As a result of records errors, one in 200 reported deaths is false, but being dead is not just annoying; it can ruin one’s credit rating as well as one’s social life.

Just how low the current standards of judging stupidity if not death are became clear with the impeachment and acquittal of then President Clinton in the Zippergate scandal. He avoided conviction for perjury and obstruction of justice because his cronies managed to stave off the unjustified onslaught of his politically motivated enemies. However, in the court of public opinion, his conduct was held in contempt by his constituents, two out of three of whom rated the state of the country’s moral values as weak. For what it is worth and to their credit, a majority of those polled were more concerned with moral issues than economic problems.43

Along with our misplaced faith that ours is a political system of, by and for moral people, we entertain an unjustified belief in justice. We do this by listening to what we are told about the courts rather than watching what happens in them. As high priests of the legal religion, the Justices of the Supreme Court set the general tone of their trade by desecrating the Constitution while extolling its virtues.

The Fourteenth Amendment provided the Court with an excellent opportunity to show what it could do to a law. It was an amendment conceived and composed with the rights of people clearly in mind. Nevertheless, the term “Person” was expanded to include corporations as legal entities. It was indeed a banner day in the history of civil rights when the Court interpreted “Person” to mean “A human being”. The key phrases of the Constitution—“Due process”, “Equal protection”, etc.—are like so many legal spigots courts regulate to suit their circumstantial fancy. Is the legal process getting too “Due”? Well, the courts cut back a bit on dueness. Is protection of the law getting too equal? Then certain, favored people will be granted a bit more equality than others by a liberal Court which has long since abandoned its efforts to create an open society of individuals cooperating in competing and is instead committed to establishing a standardized, homogenized America just when some ethnic groups are asserting their particular identity.

The “Due process” clause of the 14th amendment provides a good example of the principle that a judge does not have to been schizoid to be a member of the Supreme Court, but it helps. “Due process” means the law must be applied and obeyed. But the Court made a mockery of due process by inventing the concept of “Incorporation” by which the constitutional prohibition on congressional limitations on freedom of speech (et al.) was extended to the several states. This was facilitated by the lumping of all the amendments in the Bill of Rights together, despite the obvious fact that amendments two through eight are designed to protect individual rights—the right to bear arms, be safe from warrantless searches, etc.—while the first was
explicitly framed to limit the power of the newly created federal government. By default, the states were left free to establish religions, etc., and in some cases did—e.g., New York was legally a Methodist state until 1833. The justices who crowed about due process were those who desecrated it.

Not surprisingly, practically all popular beliefs about Constitutional government are results of political propaganda. At best, they are misleading; at worst, false. Civics books, for example, are written to inculcate in future citizens a sense of belonging and citizenship beyond any sense of reason. In no civics book does an American find that law breaking is a major preoccupation at every level of government. Although lawlessness in America has a long, dishonorable history, citizens are always surprised when they first encounter it. The fact is Americans make the best criminals in the world. For example, Cleveland, Ohio, has six times as many murders as London. More people are robbed or assaulted with intent to rob in Cleveland every year than in all of England, Scotland and Wales. More people are murdered every year in St. Louis than in England and Wales. There are more murders in New York City every year than in the British Isles, France, Italy or Germany.

Without a doubt, the worst single violation of civil rights of American citizens and abuse of the Constitution was the detention of Japanese Americans during World War II. After acknowledging the total absence of any provocation whatsoever, West Coast army commander General John DeWitt indulged in stupefying illogic when declaring, "The very fact that no sabotage has taken place is disturbing and confirming indication that such action will be taken"—a non-Pavlovian reaction to the absence of a stimulus.

In Korematsu v. United States, one of the worst decisions in Supreme Court history, former Klansman, Justice Hugo Black tried to explain away the truth. "Our task would be simple ....were this a case involving the imprisonment of a loyal citizen in a concentration camp because of racial prejudice", he wrote, which was exactly what the case was—a loyal citizen—and 127,000 others was imprisoned on the assumption that his race/ethnicity made him security risk not because of anything he had done but because of who he was. So, ironically, here is an accurate verbalization of reality blithely ignored by its writer. With no apparent cognitive dissonance whatsoever, he proceeded to rationalize the detention of a disfavored racial minority member behind barbed wire and machine gun towers because when his colleagues scrutinized the operative Executive Order 9066 for racial discrimination, they found no explicit mention of race or ethnicity. To his credit, rightslover but efficient J. Edgar Hoover informed Attorney General Biddle that mass evacuations were not necessary because all security risks had been rounded up by the FBI, which, within two hours of the attack on Pearl Harbor, began taking Japanese leaders into custody, and, as panic spread along the west coast, government officials searched houses where aliens lived for pictures or documents which might suggest loyalty Japan. Biddle duly informed the president of Hoover's message but to no effect. Politics triumphed over law and that ineffectual document, the Constitution, which, apparently, can be suspended in wartime.

Thus, this episode proved the impotency of the Constitution as a guarantor of rights which are inducements granted by government authorities for the moment. As grants, they are subject to revocation whenever it suits those in power to exercise this totally illegal and unconstitutional option. Further, when there is an abuse of authority, the courts are as likely to protect the villains as the victims. Finally, it proved the American dream of assimilation was a failed myth, but, in a rush to admit its mistake, forty years later the government apologized and made reparations of $1.6 billion to the survivors of the incarceration by their racist government.
The experience of those who at the time challenged the legality of the incarceration program calls attention to another weakness in our judicial system: someone has to break a law, and be punished before being able to get a ruling as to the legality of the law. E.g.,—from another domain, Rosa Parks had to get arrested in a bus in order to get the laws on segregation into the court system. There really should be a way to have a prior ruling on a bill’s constitutionality as it is on the way to becoming a law.

Courts really are show places for the legal process. They are invariably pretentious, ritualized and somber. Upon entering a court, one gets the immediate impression that something important must go on in such a setting. The impression is correct: justice is dispensed with. A killer is set free because some functionary dotted a "T" or crossed an eye. A defendant is railroaded because the judge or prosecutor is up for reelection and needs to toughen his/her image. The bottom line is not justice but the belief in justice, but on what is that functionless belief based? Facts and knowledge or ignorance and stupidity?

The facts are that for every 1,000 major felonies, 17 perpetrators go to jail but for what? In pretrial maneuvering, armed robbery is watered down to simple robbery, and rape is pleabargained down to assault and battery. Further, in 1983, while fortytwo percent of those sent to state prisons were on parole for prior convictions, 55,000 criminals were set free on legal technicalities.62 In 1991, only 21% of people who committed major crimes were arrested. Only 17% of murders, 5% of rapes and 3% of robbery, assault, burglary and auto theft lead to prison sentences.63 These are facts upon which our belief in the legal system is not based, and it could be considered a goldplated invitation to felons to do their thing—and it is.15

The Economy: Along with our belief in Constitutional government, we believe in the ever inflating dollar. It is curious to note that the dollar is impossible to define with accuracy and validity. At best, it is one of those green pieces of paper in your wallet or pocketbook. At worst, it is a fragment of a collective imagination which makes the economy one of the newer permanent, floating con games in America’s tawdry history of scams. Unlike the “Commodity money” silver certificates, which at least said they were redeemable in hard metal, today’s dollar bill is not worth the paper it is printed on in any literal or legal sense. As “Fiat currency”,64 it has value only because everyone believes it does and willingly accepts it accordingly. Indeed, we now have “Virtual dollars” which appear only as symbols on a ‘puter screen. Hence, our national motto really should be changed from "In God we trust" to "In the dollar—or whatever it is—we believe".65

Of course, God seems to be doing Her best to separate Himself from the country, and who can blame It. The Constitution means anything the Court wants, and the dollar is a joke on paper. It is only our inability to perceive this facts that holds America together and keeps it going. Apparently, no fundamental facts of life, no basic knowledge of reality, no logical analysis of the establishment can shake America’s faith in the system, and it is precisely this faith which permits our national nonsense to continue.

The key to understanding the incomprehensible is that we believe in capitalism. Just why we do is a mystery. Perhaps it is because we do not perceive the estates of the rich in a cause /effect juxtaposition to urban slums. Perhaps it is because the ritual of buying and selling in the market place sustains the faith in the system. Most probably, it is because most of us cannot grasp the idea that "Capitalism" is just a word which has next to nothing to do with the workings of the corporate economy.

The fact is that as an economically overdeveloped nation, America distributes poverty and misery via a politically regulated system of tribute and taxation.66 Of course, the role of free enterprise in the economy of things is essentially negligible. In fact, the major contribution of the corner shoeshine man and local farm stand operator is not economic but psychological —
justifying the continuation of capitalistic rhetoric in a world of collective regulation by megacorporations and governments. At municipal and state levels, public utilities which are not socialistically owned by government are fascistically regulated by it. However, regulation of private enterprise is most common in Washington, where federal officials engage in backscratching interactions with the special interest groups they are allegedly controlling. An example of this is the ridiculous if not insulting record of the Consumer Product Safety Commission, which under “W” pretended to regulate foreignmade products flooding our markets. The kindest thing that can be said is that it should be renamed “The Corporate Profit Safety Commission”, as it does everything it can to maximize profits for our own companies which endanger the health and welfare of our gullible citizens.

As bad as such regulation is for the economy in general, “Deregulation” can lead to some unexpected problems in some areas as it did in banking. For more than fifty years, banks hid in an artificially sheltered, unnaturally conservative environment with legal protection from competition while Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation guaranteed the survival of even the most poorly managed organizations. Stagnation replaced enterprise, and sheer incompetence became commonplace if not rewarded. With the opening up of competition among financial institutions in the 1980’s, banks sank money into a number of black holes—soil, farmland, the Third World, commercial real estate and leveraged buyouts. In the 1990’s, the absence of a functional schema proved disastrous because with no guiding cognitive model based on experience to guide them, bankers proved unable to learn from successive fiascos, and only a few CEOs were canned for mismanagement. Finally, greedy bankers raised adjustable rate mortgages so high so fast that cashstrapped home owners in 2008 had to default, ushering in a major recession.

On the labor scene, strong unions were thought to be a counterpoise to greedy business but in fact joined with mismanagement and big government to bamboozle the American worker. To the extent that unions obtained more pay for less work, they created unemployment and caused inflation. It may have been all well and good for an assembly line worker in Detroit to make $23 per hour—until the Japanese flooded the market with bettermade, cheaper cars. In 1984, the government protected and the consumer subsidized (to the tune of $600/car) management’s ineptitude and labor’s greed. Presumably, national interests were served by the protection of obsolete marketing and manufacturing strategies and the employment of workers who prevented the economic production of competitive, quality cars.

Society: Another peculiar aspect of the American labor scene is the irrelevance of selective criteria use when people try to join the work force. Traditionally, America was a caste society covered over with egalitarian maxims and morals and an incongruous ideology of racial superiority which sanctioned the system while it inhibited random interactions among equal people. Whites derived their social eminence from their technological control of the economy and, through that, the political system, although all these are eroding as the moral imperative of social justice is realized.

While it was stupid to repress talent and stifle ability in the past, it is inexcusable that we still continue to do so. Nevertheless, we continue our tradition of inefficiency by demanding the work force reflect not the distribution of ability in it but the racial composition of society in general. To this end, “Race norming”—rigging employment aptitude tests to favor minorities—has been used by thirtyeight states at the behest of the Labor Department in order to enhance the chances of blacks and Hispanics of landing jobs for which they may be less qualified than other test takers.

If the legality and sagacity of that policy are at best dubious, one certainty in the American labor market is that the individual worker has become an anachronism. In the superficial and
entertaining world of professional sports, performers may be rewarded for if not beyond proficiency and technical expertise. However, in the general work force, nonperformance criteria determine hiring (race and sex) and promotion (seniority), so mediocrity can be maintained by emphasis on factors totally irrelevant to job efficiency. In fact, a worker's main job is not to accomplish a task but to conform to and fit into the group's value system.

Although it is a secondary consideration, to the extent that a job requires an employee to do something, workers must have some basic ability, acquired through training, to handle machinery or computers. This means that some people are going to be denied jobs because they are unqualified. If such people are unwilling to accept menial positions of employment, society will probably find a place for them on welfare. We already have third generation deadbeats who expect the country to provide not an opportunity to earn a decent living but the decent living itself—as if a good income is an economic right.

In general, we now face the problem that any governmental program, policy or plan of action may quickly become maladaptive. Traditional values may be irrelevant to the young, and old definitions may not be challenged so much as ignored. The extended family has made way for the distended state, which is being computerized as it assumes its new, illconceived roles. This is rather trying for anyone clinging to presumably fundamental, eternal values in an ever evolving culture. Belief in God has been partially displaced by a belief in the state, and now the humanistic tradition is giving way to beliefs in secular organizations which are struggling to strangling themselves in red tape.

For example, the belief in federal welfare has led to government funding of urban ghettos, and as a contemporary case study of what a benign if not bungling bureaucracy cannot accomplish, our city slums compare favorably with the Indian reservations of the last century. The major difference is that reservations are legally defined areas, whereas ghettos are extralegal territories. The major similarity is that both may be characterized as tending toward the same omega point of economic, cultural and spiritual genocide. In both cases, emphasis on the level of funding and degree of sympathy misses the subtlety that providing people with food, shelter and trinkets falls short of helping them become selfsufficient.

Traditionally, black culture in America was basically a tension-reducing strategy promoted by the Associated Press and Christian churches. Fundamental Christian rituals provided temporary and meaningless emotional release from the oppressive white world. However, for all the singing, shouting and hand clapping, heavenly rewards were to be granted only those who accepted their downtrodden condition here on earth. As debilitating as resignation was, it was the best coping technique for people who were systematically denied opportunities to acquire and use skills for worldly advancement. Eventually, black leaders realized that power not patience prevailed—that rights were not granted (i.e., they were very alienable); they had to be taken to be won, and only a fool thought otherwise.

Now, blacks are granted opportunities to use skills even when someone else is better qualified. This perversion of the Constitutional mandate of equal protection of the laws undercuts the great social myth of contemporary America that poor minority groups are being helped by legitimate policies of the courts, charities and liberals who worship at the altered altar of "Civil rights". The concern of many people to help those in need is humane as well as laudable, but just how effective have the means adopted been in helping the needy escape the slovenly despair of the ghettos? Are our slums any smaller or more bearable for all the Head Starts and hot lunches that have been pointed in their direction? For all the good intentions of the establishment to beguile those in the slums to accept whatever is granted them, most children of the ghettos know that the easiest way up and out is through crime.
The saddest indictment that can be made of our urban policy.

As adjuncts of urban policy, social problems begged for sensible, reasonable solutions. For centuries, members of racial minority groups were systematically denied opportunities offered to and enjoyed by the white establishment. The reality of their bad housing, inferior educational facilities and limited possibilities for employment went unrecognized by a system set up to ignore such conditions. Gradually, however, the clear injustice of this arrangement led to protests, marches, demonstrations and riots which eventually induced real adjustments in the direction of ideals espoused by liberals—as voices incarnate of God, The Great Hermaphroditic Social Worker— but ignored for as long as possible by the conservative powerful and mighty.

Generally, the prevailing social ideal of the contemporary American establishment was that the poor minority group member could be integrated into a completely homogenized society and would join the majority if given the opportunity to do so. This provided the ideological basis for court decisions, humanitarian activities, selective appeals to civil rights, preferential consideration in admission to colleges and discriminatory alterations of qualifications for employment and promotion. Integration is all the rage, and it is so commonly understood as a social goal that it is hardly ever even mentioned amidst the rhetoric about "Civil rights", "Affirmative Action", "Women's lib", "Diversity" and "Discrimination". The abuse of this last term in our language is most revealing about prevailing ambiguity in defining acceptable means of achieving an implicit and generally laudable end.

Although it is a synonym for "Distinguishing", "Discrimination" has been equated, through long historical association, with "Segregation". What we had in the field of "Civil wrongs" was a rash of Affirmative Action laws requiring discrimination according to the color of one's skin rather than the content of his/her character as a means of achieving integration. Legitimate efforts to end racial discrimination "Against" were converted into reverse discrimination "For" by the judicial doctrine of "Disparate impact", which meant the racial composition of a workforce had to reflect the local employment pool or else. The required cognitive dissonant remedy was the adoption of quotas which were hardly hidden by such semantic disguises such as "Goals", "Timetables" and "Verifiable measurements".

Racial discrimination was supposed to have become legally unfashionable in the mid1960's, but a decade later those passionately committed to integrating society took over the means of their historic adversaries and required race to be considered in hiring and promotional procedures. In the pursuit of "Equality", the Constitutional mandate of "Equal protection of the law" has been subverted, and contrary to a ruling of the Supreme Court, minority groups have become special favorites of laws which have become means for compensating them for past experiences and current conditions. In 1985, this approach was made explicit when two members of the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights wrote "Civil rights laws were not passed to give civil rights protection to all Americans": They were presumably passed to compensate members of some groups for their minorityhood, which officially was not supposed to matter anyway.

In a related extralegal, political matter, the Democratic Party dodged cultural bullets by showing deference to the alphabet and language. At the party convention in Miami in 1972, the roll was called at random so as not to discriminate on the basis of alphabeticalness. Further, party leaders wanted to promote diversity so a commission established quotas by the handy expedient of not using the word "Quota". Having quotas was OK, but labeling them correctly as "Quotas" was not.

Labels aside, somewhere along the way, the general idea of equal opportunity morphed in the minds of some into the idea of equal results, and individual rights were transformed into group
entitlements. The arrogant commitment of government to force this ideal upon the Land of the Free led to a white backlash against the selfcontradictory omega point of Affirmative Action programs best summed up in the oxymoronic if unspoken slogans: "End racism! Hire Blacks!"; "End sexism! Hire women!". The backlash took formal shape in Chief Justice Roberts’ opinion in 2007 regarding racial discrimination in the cause of integration in schools in Louisville and Seattle with his brilliant if widely ignored insight, “The way to stop discrimination on the basis of race is to stop discriminating on the basis of race”.88

In a backlash to the backlash, liberal Justice Breyer wrote in both anger and anguish that “....efforts to continue racial segregation are constitutionally indistinguishable from efforts to achieve racial integration.”89—which is absolutely true. Racial discrimination can be used for either end: segregation or integration, and changing the end does not justify or dejustify the means. Anyone committed to ending racism would embrace a race neutral, colorblind Constitution, but those pushing for integration were not ready for that yet.

The ideological imperative which demands integration is in turn based on environmentalism as the unstated, unofficial politically erect assumption of the liberal establishment. A corollary is that education is the way to improve society, despite all the failures and shortcomings of public school systems. When necessary, variables other than race (i.e., broken homes, bad nutrition, etc.) are used to save the environmental/educational schema by serving as possible explanations for the poor learning abilities of some minority groups—Orientals, with their strong family ties, being the notable, somewhat embarrassing exception.21

This platonic insistence on theoretical support for a desired policy is actually a betrayal of the liberal tradition, one of the original hallmarks of which was an examination of all aspects of an issue so as to reach the fairest, overall conclusion. However, our mental life is currently so dominated by the democratic, subjective, relativistic, romantic acceptance of all ideas as being equally good based on a common, psychologically correct commitment to make everyone feel good22 that we do not discern right from wrong90 or better from worse. To confuse matters further, this mentality was justly condemned in the 1870’s by the knowitall Episcopal Church,23 when minister Edward Eggleston was forced to abandon his humanitarian “Church of the Christian Endeavor” in Brooklyn, NY (USA) because most people regarded it as a “Church of the Holy Ambiguity” which “Believes nothing, teaches nothing, has no opinions and admits all possible opinions as to the truth and falsehood of Christ’s Gospel and way of salvation”.91 So, being open minded is unacceptable to those who know they have THE answer.

As regrettable as this is, there is an equally unfortunate flipside to this attitude. To deal with a problem threatening to its way of life, the government condoned water boarding and torturing “Detainees” at Gitmo and elsewhere in the CIA’s penal archipelago. The questions then arise: just what is “Our way of life?” and, “Is it worth defending?” If it is “Can we do it in a manner cognitively consistent with itself?”

The answer led to the unfortunate absurdity that some leaders in our intellectual community may not believe in even the idea of truth. Everyone can gather data, and all opinions are equally valid so if 99.9% of geographers believe the earth is round and the rest think it flat, both views are to be given equal consideration.24 Ironically, in our cultural life, people who talk are presumed to be saying something (just as musicians who play a lot of discordant notes and artists who splash paint around must be expressing something meaningful), but anyone who makes an informed, deliberate, specific assertion (e.g., 2+2=4) is anathema because that breaks the taboo against implying someone else’s position might be wrong—that there is a right and wrong.
Contemporary liberals are no longer concerned with objective inquiry or a composite of subjective investigations. Indeed, on some college campuses, freedom of speech has been sacrificed to culturally correct orthodoxy. Discussion of many compelling social issues is thus restricted, unless it is based on the deconstructionist assumption that there is no hierarchy of values. Worse yet, leftist have elevated intellectual dishonesty to the status of moral virtue and often refuse even to consider a discussion of socially sensitive issue like race and behavior unless it is predirected toward confirming the relativist conclusion that all groups of people are subjectively equal in abilities. The corollary is to make a virtue of diversity even at the expense of competence if not excellence.

Such a discussion might begin with the fact that the lower classes breed more efficiently than the middle and upper classes. This is a good strategy for keeping the lower classes low, as they must divide their meager resources among more people. However, it gives a genetic advantage to carriers of cultural phenomena like illiteracy, ignorance and poverty, since the best educated, welltodo people willingly reduce their contribution to the gene pool of each succeeding generation in order to maintain their position of vaunted cultural superiority. Of course, the idea of employing birth control as a means of promoting cultural equality is lost on those who perceive reduced reproduction as a plot to suppress racial minorities, while any form of eugenics—even a policy which would forbid reproduction by certified morons, the criminally insane and lawyers—is basically unthinkable.

Foreign Policy: If it is demoralizing to look inward at our domestic idiocy, it is equally disconcerting to note that our foreign policy for fortyfive years was stuck like a broken record in a rut of rhodophobic negativity. Over and over again, we were antiCommunist, antiCommunist, antiCommunist. If this attitude was justifiable, it was partly because no American with an ounce of cognitive integrity could make positive pronouncements abroad about the corruption, drugs and crime in his country. Our commonplace pronouncements about promoting democracy were undercut by the fact that we would remove any leftist governments elected by voters in any nonCommunist country: basically, such electorates were free to select anyone of whom we approved. More generally, regardless of how governments come to power, those we support tend to stay in power; those we do not do not. If we were once the hope of the world, we betrayed that hope and now just struggled along like any other country trying to get on with those who depend on us and those who just have to tolerate us.

As for those perceived as our national enemy, the Soviets always called for an end to the Cold War because they defined it as attacks on or criticism of Communist states by the West. What they did to the Western bloc or anyone else was covered over and sanctified by the term "Peaceful coexistence". They eventually comprehended that we really did not want to beat them in a war. Of course, we wanted even less to lose to them, but our general posture toward the former Soviet Union was quite consistently defensive: we were very much oriented just toward containment and holding the line. Our stance was somewhat murkified by the difference between the ways different pols viewed the Cold War: liberals viewed it in the context of 1914—that the biggest danger lay in miscalculation or miscommunication leading to WWIII, while conservatives viewed it in the context of 1938—that the biggest danger lay in craven, Munichlike appeasement leading to WWIII. During the Cold War our government routinely tinkered with and in foreign elections, assisted or acquiesced in coups d’état which overthrew elected officials, producing repressive, corrupt regimes which violated human rights and often ran drugs: But— they were not Communist governments, which is all that really mattered.

With the end of the Cold War, it was time to reverse the tradition of finding better ways to kill our enemies and develop better ways to live with them. Fortunately for everyone, the time has past when we had to have not only the weapons...
necessary but also the insane willingness to use them to produce the ultimate peace. We can now stop pouring hundreds of billions of dollars into weapons systems we will not have time to use unless it is the last thing we ever do. We can alter the traditional picture of the incomparable stupidity of the arms race, when the conditions which caused wars—cultural isolation, aggression, need for resources, etc.—were all promoted by the fervid commitment of the world’s great powers to achieve the ultimate wargasm. Now we can concern ourselves with the underlying problems of famine, disease, poverty, ignorance and, yes, stupidity. At the same time, we can take some perverted satisfaction in knowing that every dollar spent on defense nets us five dollars worth of ill will and suspicion abroad if it goes to support not democratically elected leaders but corrupt, abusive dictators.

For the costly generation of illwill abroad, however, nothing matches America’s commitment to Israel. With zealous Zionists so powerfully entrenched in our media and government, our political leaders are clearly unable to contemplate let alone effect a MidEastern policy which would be so manifestly in the country’s best interest: let Israel go its own way while we cozy up to the oilrich Muslim countries in the area. Of course, it is all but politically suicidal heresy even to hint at suggesting the possibility that we perhaps might one day consider thinking about maybe basing our foreign policy on something like reason and sanity.

That sanity has been warped somewhat by 9/11. From the Fall of the Berlin Wall to that fateful day, we had about twelve years to deal openmindedly with events in something like an objective, if pro-Israeli, manner. Just as we had once viewed everything, overall through a red prism, now we deal with events in the context of the war on terror(ism).

Defense: Unfortunately, in any context, one way to spell “Sanity” is STUPIDITY, because it is this which provides us an escape from the incredible world we have constructed for ourselves. Fortunately, the situation is not so desperate that some fool cannot render it absurd to the point of amusement. In the case of defenseless spending, levity was provided by the Air Force General who described the price tag of $7,622 for a 10cup coffee maker as "Reasonable"! This is the kind of reason which brings comic if not financial relief to beleaguered taxpayers who never did find out what price the General would have considered "Unreasonable": $10,000? $100,000? Of course, anyone who believes $7,000 is a reasonable price for a coffeepot should not be serving in Air Force Procurement: he should out selling coffeepots.

As whistle blowers have discovered to their dismay, the prime concern of those in Waste Management seems to be to see that it continues. For a circuit breaker that John Q. Citizen could buy for $3.64, the Air Force paid $2,543, and the navy laid out $740 for a toilet seat. An hexagonal nut which cost 13 cents at the local hardware store was purchased by pentagonal nuts for $2,043—a markup of only 1,500,000%! After repeated warnings of serious, potentially widespread criminality and accumulating evidence of gross misconduct, Secretary of Expense Weinberger initiated disciplinary actions against the approver of an eleven part $659 ashtray.

If relieving the officer of command had a sobering effect on the 400,000 bureaucrats entrenched in the Pentagon’s procurement offices, it did not last long. Known then for buying $700 toilet seats and $435 hammers, the Pentagon wasted $100 million on airline tickets from 1997 to 2002 because weak internal controls led to millions being squandered on tickets that went unused and not refunded and millions more where the Department of Defense paid travelers for improper and potentially fraudulent claims.

If those in Military Waste Management in the late 20th Century were committed to see that it continued, they were incredibly successful. The GAO, in Dec., 2008, reported waste and
specifically cited the Navy for keeping an average of $7.5 billion worth of spare parts and other goods it does not need—exceeding the Navy’s requirements by about 40%—every year because of poor planning and management. According to a GOA report, the Navy failed to heed repeated warning since 2001 about longstanding problems with inventory mismanagement, and although most of the surplus inventory could be used in the future, 28% could never be used at all. Not surprisingly, the report states that Navy mismanagers are not held accountable for cost inefficiency, which encourages them to rack up billions of dollars in excess inventory.113 Some of these have consequently devoted themselves to expanding the Defense Department’s definition of "Procurer" to cover someone who overcharges an anonymous party (i.e., the taxpayer) for something more than just the traditional screw.

That “Something more” included a $43 million gas station built by the Department of Defense in Afghanistan from 2011 to 2014. No explanation was given for why it was 140 times more expensive than a similar station constructed in neighboring Pakistan.114

As bad as the military was, it was just typical of government in general as revealed by the Grace Commission report of 1984. Calling the federal government “The worst run enterprise in America”, the report itemized more that 2,700 examples of poor management and idiotic waste. For example, the Department of Health and Human Services paid Medicare benefits to more than 8,000 dead people. The Government Printing Office wasted $96 million mailing publications to incorrect addresses, and the justice Department failed to deposit seized drug money in interest bearing accounts.115 And yet we increasingly turned to the government to run our lives.

Sad to say, the new century brought nothing new—just continuity—to the field of governmental mismanagement. Although the Justice Department pales when compared to the pros at waste and mismanagement at the Defense Department, it shows the ability of gifted tyros. Cynthia Schnedar, the Department’s acting inspector general, exposed wasteful or extravagant spending at conferences which featured costly meals and refreshments. These included Beef Wellington hours d’ oeuvres at $7.32 per serving and coffee for $8.24 per cup, which was used to wash down $16 muffins and $10 cookies.116

All that is chickenfeed compared to a report by Wartime Contracting Commission which cited major problems in how tens of billions of dollars were spent in the Iraq and Afghan wars. Specifically mentioned were poor management, weak oversight and a failure to learn from mistakes—a veritable operational definition of stupidity. With so much money to be thrown around, there was no particular incentive to disperse it prudently, so, for lack of ethics and integrity, almost $9 billion of $30 billion disappeared.118 To complete the picture, whistle blowers who have reported corruption in Iraq have been vilified, demoted, fired or worse for committing the greatest psychosocial sin of them all—telling the truth.

Deserving special mention in this context is Halliburton—a company formerly run by former VicePresident Dick Cheney. While in office, he maintained his financial connections with the organization, which is at best sloppy and at worst corrupt. However, if it is sloppy, it is oddly sloppy to its own advantage to the tune of billions.120 (In this case, the whistle blower was one Bunnatine Greenhouse, who was ostracized for righteously asserting that army contracts should be awarded competitively rather than just handed to insiders.121)

Continuing this theme of waste (on hardware) but changing the focus of mismanagement (of finances) to the field of human software, we find ourselves at sea reading a memo written in the early 1990’s by commander of the Navy’s surface Atlantic fleet Vice Admiral Joseph S. Donnell. It characterized lesbian sailors as “Hard-working, career-oriented, willing to put in long
hours on the job and among the command's top performers”. One might think that characterization would serve as a reason for recruiting lesbians into the Navy, but who ever said the Navy was reasonable? The document concluded that lesbians should be rooted out of the service, and if there is something counterproductive in this inconsistency, it is at least consistent with the reigning square Pentagon policy, which maintained that homosexuality was incompatible with military service.

This attitude remained despite the fact that two studies commissioned by the Pentagon found no evidence that homosexuals disrupted the armed forces but rather praised their performance and urged their retention.26 The Department of Defense initially suppressed these reports and then dismissed them as unresponsive to the original research request, which was to confirm the reigning schema—the demonstrably fallacious but prevalent notion that the presence of homosexuals was detrimental to military efficiency.122

The Environment: If the defense establishment policy toward efficient and productive gays is hostile and costly,123 the relationship of America to its natural environment is parasitic if not suicidal. However, we have surprisingly few illusions about ourselves being anything but exploiters, as we simultaneously rape, strangle and poison our life support system. Eventually, such behavior will limit our development, and we are actually hastening that day in that we have elevated exploitation to something of a cultural virtue.

While struggles in the fields of politics and social relations dominated the postwar consciousness, there gradually grew in the background an awareness of the ominous strain the burgeoning human population is putting on the world's limited resources. Earth Days notwithstanding, this awareness remains largely the property of environmentalists124 while political power remains in the hands of industrialists who are willing victims of the neurotic paradox. In the pursuit of immediate profits, they are dedicated to the irresponsible exploitation of nature's resources and seem determined to top all the stupidity of all ages past combined with a grandiose display of pollution and destruction of the natural world that supports them. To this end, they have thus far succeeded in keeping the government officials who should be monitoring their nefarious activities happily mired down in their own self-constructed restrictive rules, regulations and red tape.

With industry dedicated to the immediate ravaging of the environment, some kind of international birth control policy limiting the quantity of human life must be implemented if any kind of quality of life is to be sustained over the long haul. For what it is worth, which is not much, the Catholic Church's position on the population problem is consistent with the idea that the miracle of the loaves and fishes can be repeated endlessly.125 For skeptics, another nongrowth strategy is very much in order if not much in evidence.

One strategy that has to go is the obsolete growth and development syndrome.126 With the earth's resources already apparently stretched to the limit, we simply cannot sustain continued growth of the human population,127 particularly if it is bent on maintaining the current standard of living while wrecking its support system, as it currently is. However, a new philosophy of selflimitations is going to be difficult to formulate, could not be imposed on an unenlightened public and will probably be accepted only after we finally become ashamed of how much enduring misery we can create and the world can maintain—or maybe when it ceases to be perceived as profitable.

The greatest stupidity of all is that we have made our own plight difficult and are making it impossible with overpopulation, pollution and the exploitation of nonrenewable resources. There are some encouraging signs that these problems are finally being recognized as such by people in positions of power, although too little is being
done about them. Thus, a stupid person has an advantage in coping with this world over one who tries to understand it logically, as it is a world of compromises, tradeoffs and shabby political charades pulled off by selfseeking hacks using ideas and abusing ideals to suit their seedy needs and sordid purposes. The surprise is not that it does not make any sense but that anyone with any brains ever believed it could.

There are two factors which are crucial to the systematic desecration of the environment: 1.) the organization and mobilization of people for the task, and 2.) the development of machinery to facilitate the process. Our population is well suited in both quantity and quality to wrecking the environment in that there are too many of us committed to a standard of living beyond the carrying capacity of God—that is, to a standard which is attainable for the entire population for only a limited period of time.128 In addition, there is specialization and division of labor in our attack on the environment: those not actively engaged in ravaging the land usually devote their energies to polluting the air and water. All this is done in the name of profit and for the sake of more bigger and costlier possessions for as many people as possible. Sadly, the ultimate limits for population growth will be determined not by reasoned planning but by the efficiency with which we poison our support system and convert our urban centers into behavioral sewers.

To accelerate this process of social suicide, we have turned to machines and computers. The guiding maxim is that the world must be made safe for technology. The worst part of this trend is not that we are evermore efficient at wrecking the environment but that we are bent on creating a world in which machines rather than people can thrive. To the extent that we become robots, we will fit into the world we are creating. However, our success in adapting will be a function of our willingness to renounce the differences between humanity and cybernity. Civilization has developed to the mutually interactive point that we now have to become less human as we adapt to the selfeffacing technology which creates us.

Art: The message of contemporary America is clear: people are out. They are obsolete, except to the extent they serve computers. The tradition of humans adapting to their tools has reached the pointless point that all phenomena (like feelings) which cannot be quantified for computers have been rendered irrelevant by them. In a sense, technology and modern art are equal in being devoid of human emotion—but, still, some art is better than it looks.

People and feelings were distorted and abstracted out of art early in the twentieth century. As artists sought novelty of expression for its own sake, emotional impoverishment came to reign in a world of any and all contrived means devoted to no particular end.129 Just as modern composers labor to reduce if not eliminate the distinction between music and noise,130—to the decided detriment of noise—by subconsciously representing random chance in space, modern artists aptly express the vacant extreme of total irrelevance and meaninglessness that civilization has achieved. As a triumph of technique masking the absence of substance, it represents the ultimate victory of public relations in modern life. As an exercise in cognitive and spiritual futility, contemporary, nonobjective131 cum abstract go drip, irresponsible art is a wakeup call reflecting the basic spiritual emptiness and moral void of emotionally bankrupt Western institutions and life.27

Education: This bankruptcy is further demonstrated by the way many serious social problems develop unexpectedly, often resulting from neglect, ignorance and wishful thinking. For example, when the government insisted on busing school children in and out of cities, about 30% of the white suburban school population dropped out of the public school system and went to private schools. It is certainly to be hoped that the equalization of academic training achieved by busing between urbs and suburbs compensates for the effects of discrimination on the students,
and to the extent that the goal of integration was achieved, liberals must have been gratified.132 However, the discriminatory method applied was counterproductive in that it drove off many of the students counted on to serve as so many "Racial units" in the bus drive to substitute one bunch of equal kids for another. Of course, this has been a lesson wasted on departments of human services.

The contemporary mania for social equality might be laudable were not egalitarians so passionately committed to leveling downward.133 Formal educational systems cannot be expected to improve society because schools are now primarily social institutions designed to bring young people together in an integrated setting. The commitment to academics is not dead, but it is distinctly second to our efforts to create equal citizens. Naturally, this makes any gesture toward excellence awkwardly out of place.

In addition to our egalitarian bent, a commitment to illusion rather than achievement contributed to the deterioration of academic standards over the past few decades. At the same time that we were inflating our currency to create the illusion that we were getting more than we earned, we were inflating diplomas134 to create the illusion that students were accomplishing more than they learned. Of course, cheapening grades does nothing for the learning process, but it makes a lot of students feel good about themselves. The longterm result is that bloated grades and diplomas cease to be of value to anyone, but that is irrelevant to those who live in a world increasingly determined by PC symbols rather than substance.

Sad to say, not everyone loses equally. The real, major losers are the students who need to develop skills for coping in the job market because those who need some extra help are the ones who are most likely to get inflated grades rather than more, better training. Worse yet, those who aspire to escape the inner cities may have to attend schools which are physically the oldest and in which teacher turnover is the highest.

Although some may think that education could be the salvation of the disenfranchised, in this regard, blacks in New York City certainly do not have much to look forward to from or in the Establishment. As Dr. Donna Shalala, when president of Hunter College pointed out, the New York public schools had a dropout rate of 42% in 1984, with relatively few blacks graduating and being integrated into the system. Thus, many are becoming alienated and learning to live in what will amount to a foreign country in their own land. As might have been expected, New York City officials treated Dr. Shalala as a traitor to the cause of education for pointing out that the cause was failing, which it obviously was.135

The factors contributing to this failure of the urban educational system are, of course, legion. The school facilities in the inner cities are usually old and decrepit. Teacher turnover is high, with few teachers staying in such schools for more than five years and some children having as many as four teachers a year. Community support is minimal and distractions maximal. The net result is that those who need more help are getting less, so many unfortunately leave school, sooner than later, inadequately prepared to find decent employment or continue their education.136

The fact of life in inner city schools is that truancy is excessive, with teachers being privately relieved when problem students are absent. In their early teens, children begin leaving school to join the ranks of the unemployed and eke out a living on odd jobs and crime. They have not yet been organized into any large scale criminal or political movement, but if and when they ever are, the failure of public education will become obvious even to those responsible for it.137

Whether this ever happens or not, we remain in danger of losing a generation of young urbanites largely because they have no formal education. They have no intellectual skills, no guidance and, worst of all, no hope. They know no one who has successfully managed to get out of the inner
city, and if they have learned anything in school, it is that they cannot make it in the system—a frustrating awareness that contributed to the hostility to established authorities manifested in the urban riots of the 1960's. If they are motivated to do anything, it is to get up and out any way they can, which in far too many cases leads them to reform schools, psychiatric clinics and often eventually to prisons.

Within the system, the problem of measuring learning ability has always been one of testing and, more specifically, one of developing an unbiased test. Generally, what might be referred to as the standard IQ test was soundly criticized as a middle class device for intellectual discrimination against minority groups that do not do well on them: or, in Marxian terms, intellectual competence is a device of bourgeois suppression. Such criticism formed the basis for a court decision in 1980 which declared it unconstitutional to use intelligence tests to place black children in classes for the retarded. The ruling stated: "An unbiased test that measures ability or potential should yield the same pattern of scores when administered to different groups of people." And it would, if ability were equally distributed among different groups, but that is just an assumption and, given the unequal distribution of educational resources, an unlikely reality. If a test provides results which contradict this assumption, that is hardly a reason not to throw out the test but rather to check both the test and the assumption.

Further, in developing analytical stupidity and frustrating artistic ability, American educational institutions are highly onesided in that they concentrate intensely on the verbal left hemisphere of the brain. As befitting a highly industrialized society, the abilities to focus on fantasies, ignore facts, misapply rules and massage data to confirm preconceived illusions are all cultivated in our classrooms and labs. Rather than being wellsprings of creativity, our schools and colleges are devoted to propagating acceptable answers to established questions. In the sterility of academics, everything is reduced to corporate reason while being rendered irrelevant.

In the world at large, leaders are often the worst students and quite reluctant to learn about and understand what they are doing. Mental stagnation at upper levels of government is as common as is supposed, since rulers usually strive to maintain intact the schemas with which they started. No less of a pundit than Henry Kissinger noted that leaders of state do not learn beyond their convictions. When confronting a problem, they seek information that will make it seem similar to previous situations. Their experiences may confirm beliefs or lead to minor adjustments of policy, but the mighty are ill disposed to learn they are wrong about anything. In contrast to our victory over Iraq in 1991, our government backed losers in China, Cuba, Vietnam and Iran in its commitment to demonstrate America’s inability to profit from its losses for the sake of being itself and providing yet another example of a society corrupted from the top down.

Identity: Maintaining "Identity" can really stupefying, as demonstrated in Louisiana in the 1960's when officials were proceeding to integrate the schools with all deliberate sloth. A proposal that integration be started in kindergarten and then proceed one grade per year for twelve years was rejected for the worst of all possible reasons—because it would work. The good ol' boys in power did not want a plan that would work; they wanted to be themselves. The only problem with "Being yourself" is that it can create so much difficulty for the problem people who think we should all do what is efficient and right.

Expanding beyond segregated schools to the racially bigoted southern society in general, the presumption of systemic dissonance was expressed in the pithy observation: "They're all torn apart inside. They try to make you believe that things that are not all right are fine, and they sweat as they search for the words to do it with..." However, bigots may not be torn up inside. They can be quite happy being themselves and get agitated only when some problem
person from outside points out the discrepancy between what Jesus Christ said and they themselves do.

In an entirely different context, Frank Serpico was just such a problem person. He wanted to be a good policeman, which to him meant doing what the law said. This made him something of an anomaly in New York City during the mid-1960's. Officer Serpico found that bribery, graft and extortion were such common forms of police behavior that cop after cop was encouraged by the prevailing culture to go on the take. In a department awash in its own arrogance, he made a career of making enemies among his colleagues by the unheard of practice of policing the police. Naturally, he became known as a trouble maker when he insisted on standing on principle and forcing awareness of the existing, cognitively dissonant conflict between official standards and actual police conduct. Although the department ignored him as best it could for as long as possible, his efforts were not totally in vain. He finally went to the newspapers and generated enough publicity to effect some temporary reforms.

Is it not stupid that—cognitive dissonance aside—Serpico had to fight against the system just to get it to live up to its own stated standards or, alternatively, that it states such standards? He was peculiarly obsessed with the notion that the government should obey the law. He discovered the hard way that the Nixonian doctrine that officials are above the law is rather common in American life, and this insight and his integrity were lost to the nation when his career was ended by a serious wound received when his colleagues deliberately left him out on a limb during a drug raid: he then went into self-assumed exile in Europe.

In this vein, a person of integrity in a world of cons and scams really can be annoying. An Hispanic, with the unlikely name of Henry Harrison, proved this point when he became a fly in the ointment of integration by insisting on doing what was right. In 1984, Mr. Harrison was a fireman in Miami when he asked his superiors to remove his name from a promotion list so that he would not advance over colleagues he considered more deserving. His chief expressed shock and confusion over Harrison's reluctance to take advantage of Affirmative Action guidelines to move ahead of fellow workers who had scored higher in the qualification process. From Harrison's standpoint, his decision might be considered stupid, in that he was sacrificing his own advancement for the sake of creating a more efficient fire department. The ironic point is that he had to do this in the face of regulations which were designed to promote people according to qualities irrelevant to job performance. How nice it might be if advancement of individuals within a group and improvement of group efficiency went together rather than being at odds with each other.

As vexing as Serpico's acts of conscience were for the establishment, Mr. Harrison's was even more so because he showed that simply obeying or abiding by the laws and rules is not enough if those regulations themselves are unconscionable. Beyond commandments inscribed in stone, Constitutions written on parchment and laws compiled in books, there is a spirit which animates a culture. It is this which provides an ethical and moral basis for judging the stupidity of official schemas. The irony inherent in culture is that religious beliefs are so often at odds with behavioral norms.

This problem is particularly confusing for Americans, because, more than any other nation on earth, we are a hodgepodge descended from Europeans, Africans, Asians and native Americans. We are Christians, Jews and atheists. We are capitalists, fascists, socialists and anarchists. We are a dynamic conflict of many competing interests all bent on getting more than their fair share of the national pie rather than making the pie bigger. No student of society, government or economics can look upon us without a sense of bewildered amazement. If life is a temporary state of dynamically imbalanced conditions, and it is, America is certainly very much alive, but
that such a chaos of conflicting schemas can flourish is due in large part to the stupidity of Americans who resolutely refuse to perceive inconsistencies where they exist. Only those who are stupid enough to try to understand what is going on find that it could not possibly "Make sense". Oddly, there is both security and danger in the incomprehensibility of the American experience: we are too complex to be wrecked by planning, but we have lost control of our own fate.

In a similar vein, the inability of minority group members to match up even to "Special" standards is sometimes strikingly displayed to the embarrassment of all. Such was the case in New York City in September, 1984, when only 1.6% of black candidates passed a police sergeant's exam which had been designed to favor minorities. The explanation for the poor showing on the exam was that, in its effort to find or create sergeants among minority groups, the department apparently allowed many totally unqualified candidates to take the test.151 This commitment to integration thus ended up with everyone getting a black eye—officials, who were obviously willing to sacrifice quality on the Procrustean bed of equality, and black patrolmen, who performed so badly on a test doctored to make them look good.

Perhaps because government officials think they can decree by fiat that test results and promotional procedures must confirm the liberal ideal that all groups are created equal in ability, society is failing to provide minority group members with the skills they need to compete on an even footing with everyone else but nevertheless granting them undeserved positions of authority. The tragedy is that if America is unwilling to pay the immediate price for improving public education, everyone will pay eventually, directly or indirectly.152 For those denied a decent education, it means wasted lives or being showcased in positions beyond their competence. For society in general, it means at least inefficiency and probably an increase in crime and an added burden on social services. Those who think they are immune to these problems are deceiving themselves about being above and beyond dealing with incompetent bureaucrats and the economic costs of $1 billion a year153 for crime prevention programs, police protection and prisons.

It is noteworthy that the ideologies of many groups of economically disenfranchised Americans do not represent efforts on their part to understand their condition cognitively so much as to cope with it emotionally, and they range from theories of black supremacy to perversions of civil rights. In this latter context, one of the more popular cliches is "Minority rights" (i.e., black rights, women's rights, etc.), which implies that members of minority groups have legal rights others do not and contrary to an earlier ruling by the Supreme Court are now not just mere citizens but special favorites of the law.154 In fact, "Civil rights" has come to mean "Integration", and if this end is laudable and desirable, the means of requiring racial and sexual discrimination to attain it are not, even according to the professed standards and values espoused by liberals. However, as long as the government tries to impose equality upon society by accepting mere competence as a substitute for excellence, everyone but the incompetent will lose as institutions become less efficient.

The basic problem of America is one of breadth without depth. With so much to draw on in terms of both human and natural resources, national character was shaped by pragmatic, shortterm policies geared to specific and often isolated situations. So often, as both the New Dealers and Watergate gang found, solutions became problems: the reaction to bad business and bad politics was bad government. The only thing we do not have is an American way of wrecking the country. American stupidity is creative in that there seems to be no limit on the ways we can find to take a bad situation and make it worse.

Ironically, the national commitment to our own wellbeing has become a fatal break preventing us from achieving the progress politicians are always proclaiming or promising. Progress is a matter of passing beyond an existing state of
affairs.155 In a material sense, this means developing a higher standard of living, and this we have achieved. However, attaining the physical comforts of material prosperity has made us both proud and uneasy, as there has been no progress toward peace of mind. Behind our pride exists the gnawing realization that immediate compassion and concern for the downtrodden and dispossessed cannot be converted into legislative programs of any significant longterm success. Slums, apathy, ignorance and stupidity remain as real and debilitating as ever before because we have made no enduring commitment to help others less fortunate then ourselves to improve their lives. In human terms, America hardly represents progress much less promise for the future.

References:

2. Halberstam, D. 1975. The Powers That Be. University of Illinois Press; Chicago, IL. (2000.) 8. The big change was that the people ceased to look to the state government as the prime effector and looked to the federal government to deal with is-sues and solve problems.
8. Russell. op. cit. 241. The following pages continue this theme.
10. Arnold. op. cit. 78.
23. Ibid.
28. Arnold. op. cit. 41.
31. Arnold. op. cit. 44.
33. Sass. op. cit. 289. Can you conger up a scene in the board room of a tobacco company where execs labor to get the num-ber up to $30,000/death?
35. Treaster, J. June 14, 1992. 20 Years of War on Drugs, and No Victory. The New York Times. E7. (Specific facts updated in 2004.) Should we say, “More than 45 Years” now? It is not working. We are losing. Do something else. On the bright side, the federal government's war on drugs is at least as successful as its wars on crime, poverty (Boot. xviii.) and literacy. ©JFW


38. Tuchman. op. cit. 386.


46. Ibid. 237.

47. Record, G. 1936. How to Abolish Poverty. The George L. Record Memorial Association; Jersey City, NJ. Chapter 1.

48. Brandeis, L. 1920. Gilbert v Minnesota. 254 US 325. For a general discussion, see Urofsky: 280ff. To be unnecessarily subtle, the third (quartering troops) and seventh (trial by jury) have not yet been incorpo-rated. (Ibid. 285.)


53. O'Reilly, B. and Dugard, M. Killing the Rising Sun. Henry Holt; New York. 2016. p. 62ff. The worst decision was Dred Scott (1857)—that blacks are not citi-zens, and the second worst was Plessy vs. Ferguson (1896)—separate can be equal.


56. Stone, G. op. cit. 296.


60. Murphy, F. Jus. Concurrent opinion in Hirabayashi v. United States. 1943. Murphy originally wrote his opinion as a dissent but was persuaded by Justice Frankfurter to cast it as a concurring opinion. Fairly put, it is a negative concurrence.


64. Mann. op. cit. 172.


68. Meehan, J. May 27, 1999. America's Bumbling Bankers: Ripe for a New Fiasco. Business Week; 86-87. Psychologically, this was rather “interesting” in that $1 trillion which bankers thought existed did not. (Sass. 366.) Sharing the misery, the global stock market lost $30 trillion—that is $30,000, 000,000,000. (Ibid. 367.) It appears that Americans are addicted to dollars that do not exist. (Ibid. 381.) For anyone who wonders
what is going to happen, the answer is, the dollar will become worthless. Anyone who can corner the market on “0’s” would clean up.

69. Hammond. op. cit.


71. Hammond. op. cit. 193.


74. Hammond. op. cit. 342.


86. Reynolds, W. 1970’s. Cited on page 223 of Hayward, S. 2009. op. cit. In an entirely different context, labels played a role as the space race was getting off the ground. America’s first satellite was launched using a Jupiter-C rocket, which had been available a year earlier but which went unused due to bureaucratic inertia. To help cover up the faux pas, the name of the rocket was changed to Juno-1. (Shepard and Slayton. 45.)


91. Quotation from the Christian Union. May, 19, 1875. 442.


98. Stern, S. Remembering Pinochet’s Chile. 2006. Duke University Press; Durham, NC. 22. In addition, U.S. support-ed operatives in South America put the worst totalitarian re-gimes to shame with their kidnap-ping, torturing and murdering of political (i.e., leftist) op-ponents. (Hancock. 316.)


101. Hayward, S. op. cit. 284. The lesson learned re: Munich was remisapplied by 43 when rationalizing the totally unjusti-fied invasion of Iraq in 2003–to eliminate the alleged threat Saddam Hussein did not pose to the USA. (Eichenwald. 497.)


103. Tuchman. op. cit. 8.

104. Pitkin. op. cit. 426.


115. Hayward, S. op. cit. 340. (Close paraphrase.)


6. For those who care, the Bible is explicitly anti-gay. Leviticus: 18, 22. (620-332 B. C. A prolonged gestation.) For those who do not, porn publish–er Larry Flint denounced the Bible as ”The biggest piece of shit ever written”. (Lief and Caldwell. 246.)

124. Read, R. Feb. 18, 2008. Is there still a role for the state? (Mr. Read was running for European Parliament, and his comment had global implications.)


126. Hammond. op. cit. p. 141.


129. Tomlin, E. 1979. Novelty is the chief aim in art. In Duncan and M. Weston-Smith. op. cit. 236. Of course, novelty is one possible aim in art. There are others.)


133. Purcell. op. cit. 95.


137. Ibid.


139. Walker. op. cit. 228.


142. Ornstein, R. 1978. The split and the whole brain. Human Na–ture; 1, 76-83. As neurologist Winston S. Churchill noted, the problem is that the human brain has two hemispheres, only one of which does any thinking (Churchill. 1930. 331.)–and that leads to crass stupidity. If we could but cultivate our right hemisphere, we would have twice as much stupidity inter–related in artistic ratios.


145. Tuchman. op. cit. 383.
5.
149. Rappe, E. Jan. 26, 2010. 5:16 PM The Real
Frank Serpi-co Looks Back. AOL.
1D.
152. Walker. op. cit. p. 228.
1978.
155. Pitkin. op. cit. 272.