

Israeli Public Less Hawkish on Iran

A new poll shows that Israelis have a more skeptical view toward bombing Iran than some of their leaders, not to mention the neocon war hawks in the United States, a finding that ex-CIA analyst Paul R. Pillar says should bolster President Obama's resistance to an Israeli strike.

By Paul R. Pillar

Shibley Telhami of the University of Maryland, in cooperation with the Dahaf Institute of Israel, has just released the results of a poll taken within the past week of Israeli opinion toward Iran and American politics. Israeli attitudes toward the efficacy of a military strike against the Iranian nuclear program parallel the range of views one hears on that subject in the United States.

If there is any surprise, it is that Israeli views are not any more hawkish than they are, notwithstanding the war rhetoric that the Netanyahu government has been disseminating for many months. (Anyone who doubts the ability of government drum beating to build public support for a war should recall the enormous effect on American public opinion of the George W. Bush administration's drumbeat on Iraq.)

Only 22 percent of Israelis believe that a military strike by Israel would delay Iran's ability to develop nuclear weapons by at least five years; another 22 percent estimate a delay of three to five years. Nine percent of Israelis believe the delay would be only one or two years. Thirty percent of the respondents believe a strike would either have no effect on the Iranian program or would accelerate it.

Asked what the effect of an Israeli strike would be on the Iranian government, respondents were evenly split between those who believe a strike would weaken the Iranian regime and those who believe it would be strengthened.

On the key question of whether Israel should launch such a strike notwithstanding the fact that the United States and powers advise against it, only 19 percent of Israelis favor a strike even in the face of U.S. opposition. Thirty-four percent oppose a strike no matter what. A plurality, 42 percent, would back a strike only if it had at least the support of the United States.

That last result should form the basis for President Barack Obama's main talking point when he meets with Prime Minister Netanyahu next week. The president should make it clear that if the Israeli government launches a war, it will not have U.S. support. This would mean that such an act of strategic foolhardiness

would also be an act of political foolhardiness for Netanyahu, given that it would fly in the face of the views of the large majority of Israelis.

This advice admittedly runs against the customary way of looking at relations between Israel and the United States, in which we seem to have become resigned to the former country playing the politics of the latter country like a violin. But the superpower patron, not just the generously supported client, ought to be able to play too.

In this regard, Telhami's poll offers some additional support for President Obama. Asked whom they would like to win this year's U.S. presidential election, Israelis split evenly in a race between Obama and Romney, and they clearly prefer Obama in match-ups against each of the other candidates still in the Republican primary race. (The strongest preference for Obama is over Rick Santorum, the candidate who has sounded most bellicose about Iran.)

Whatever effect the Republican candidates' striving to outdo the president as lovers of Israel may be having on the hard-core Republican base in the United States, it doesn't seem to be winning over a lot of Israelis.

When President Obama addresses AIPAC next week, he should, and undoubtedly will, express continued strong U.S. support for the security of Israel. He also should, but probably will not, discuss the consequences of a possible military strike on Iran in terms that mirror Israeli views as measured in this week's poll.

He should talk about how the most that could be accomplished by a strike is a short-term delay in Iranian activities and that a strike would set the stage for unending military conflict with the Iranians. He should also talk about how the political effect in Iran would be at least as likely to strengthen the loathed regime in Tehran as to weaken it.

Why should a U.S. president get in trouble with AIPAC by speaking in terms that reflect the views of the Israeli people? If he does get in trouble, it will only demonstrate anew how AIPAC does not represent the views, or the interests, of the Israeli people as a whole.

Of course, if the president were to speak in such terms he would be met with a chorus of denunciation by American critics who already have been arguing that the military option should be talked up, not down, and that saber rattling is the best way to get Iranian attention and Iranian concessions. But political and psychological imperatives mean that the response of Supreme Leader Khamenei or other Iranian leaders to saber rattling is more likely to be to dig in their heels and be more conscious than ever of the need not to show weakness.

Amitai Etzioni's recent contribution in these spaces is quite correct that negotiation represents the only way out of this dangerous impasse, and that the open promotion of regime change in Tehran only reduces the chance of negotiating anything with the Iranians. But he is wrong that threatening a war is the way to promote negotiations.

The idea that the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003 was some sort of enticement to negotiate is no more valid with Iran than it was, as some have argued, with Libya. (Qaddafi's decisions to get out of terrorism, to end his weapons-development programs and to negotiate a new relationship with the United States came several years earlier.)

The high point in Iranian cooperation with the United States came in late 2001 and early in 2002, *before* the Bush administration slammed the door in the Iranians' face and declared the Axis of Evil. The 2003 invasion was a reminder of Washington's dedication to regime change, not to negotiation.

Negotiation is indeed the way out of possible disaster, and the way to negotiation, even with the most difficult and obstreperous regimes, is through patient engagement. The most recent development in dealing with the North Korean nuclear program demonstrates that truth once again.

Paul R. Pillar, in his 28 years at the Central Intelligence Agency, rose to be one of the agency's top analysts. He is now a visiting professor at Georgetown University for security studies. (This article first appeared as blog post at The National Interest's Web site. Reprinted with author's permission.)

US Media Hypes Iran Inspection Flap

Major U.S. news outlets spin any event regarding Iran's nuclear program in the most negative way, now hyping a dispute about conditions for visiting a military site as supposed proof that Iran has something to hide. But Gareth Porter points out that the media is missing key nuances.

By Gareth Porter

News media reported last week that Iran had flatly refused the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) access to its Parchin military test facility, based on a statement to reporters by IAEA Deputy Director General, Herman Nackaerts,

that "We could not get access."

Now, however, explicit statements on the issue by the Iranian Ambassador to the IAEA and the language of the new IAEA report indicate that Iran did not reject an IAEA visit to the base per se but was only refusing access as long as no agreement had been reached with the IAEA governing the modalities of cooperation.

That new and clarifying information confirms what I reported Feb. 23. Based on the history of Iranian negotiations with the IAEA and its agreement to allow two separate IAEA visits to Parchin in 2005, the Parchin access issue is a bargaining chip that Iran is using to get the IAEA to moderate its demands on Iran in forging an agreement on how to resolve the years-long IAEA investigation into the "Possible Military Dimensions" of the Iranian nuclear program.

In an email to me and in interviews with Russia Today, Reuters, and the Fars News Agency, the Iranian Permanent Representative to the IAEA, Ali Asghar Soltanieh, said Iran told the high-level IAEA mission that it would allow access to Parchin once modalities of Iran-IAEA cooperation had been agreed on.

"We declared that, upon finalization of the modality, we will give access [to Parchin]," Soltanieh wrote in an email to me.

In the Russia Today interview on Feb. 27, reported by Israel's Haaretz and The Hindu in India but not by western news media, Soltanieh referred to two IAEA inspection visits to Parchin in January and November 2005 and said Iran needs to have "assurances" that it would not "repeat the same bitter experience, when they just come and ask for the access."

There should be a "modality" and a "frame of reference, of what exactly they are looking for, they have to provide the documents and exactly where they want [to go]," he said.

But Soltanieh also indicated that such an inspection visit is conditional on agreement about the broader framework for cooperation on clearing up suspicions of a past nuclear weapons program. "[I]n principle we have already accepted that when this text is concluded we will take these steps," Soltanieh said.

The actual text of the IAEA report, dated Feb. 24, provides crucial information about the Iranian position in the talks that is consistent with what Soltanieh is saying. In its account of the first round of talks in late January on what the IAEA is calling a "structured approach to the clarification of all outstanding issues," the report states:

"The Agency requested access to the Parchin site, but Iran did not grant access

to the site *at that time* [emphasis added]." That wording obviously implies that Iran was willing to grant access to Parchin if certain conditions were met.

On the Feb. 20-21 meetings, the agency said that Iran "stated that it was still not able to grant access to that site." There was likely a more complex negotiating situation behind the lack of agreement on a Parchin visit than had been suggested by Nackaerts and reported in western news media.

But not a single major news media report has reported the significant difference between initial media coverage on the Parchin access issue and the information now available from the initial IAEA report and Soltanieh. None have reported the language of the report indicating that Iran's refusal to approve a Parchin visit in January was qualified by "at that time".

Only AFP and Reuters quoted Soltanieh at all. Reuters, which actually interviewed Soltanieh, quoted him saying, "It was assumed that after we agreed on the modality, then access would be given." But that quote only appears in the very last sentence of the article, several paragraphs after the reiteration of the charge that Iran "refused to grant [the IAEA] access" to Parchin.

The day after that story was published, Reuters ran another story focusing on the IAEA report without referring either to its language on Parchin or to Soltanieh's clarification.

The Los Angeles Times ignored the new information and simply repeated the charge that Iran "refused to allow IAEA inspectors to visit Parchin military base." Then it added its own broad interpretation that Iran "has refused to answer key questions about its nuclear development program." Iran's repeated assertions that the documents used to pose questions to it are fabricated were thus dismissed as non-qualified answers.

The Parchin access story entered a new phase today with a Reuters story quoting Deputy Director General Nackaerts in a briefing for diplomats that there "may be some ongoing activities at Parchin which add urgency to why we want to go." Nackaerts attributed that idea to an unnamed "Member State," which is apparently suggesting that the site in question is being "cleaned up."

The identity of that "Member State," which the IAEA continues to go out of its way to conceal, is important, because if it is Israel, it reflects an obvious interest in convincing the world that Iran is working on nuclear weapons.

As former IAEA Director-General Mohamed ElBaradei recounts on p. 291 of his memoirs, "In the late summer of 2009, the Israelis provided the IAEA with documents of their own, purportedly showing that Iran had continued with nuclear weapon studies until at least 2007."

The news media should be including cautionary language any time information from an unnamed “Member State” is cited as the source for allegations about covert Iranian nuclear weapons work. It could very likely be coming from a State with a political agenda. But the unwritten guidelines for news media coverage of the IAEA and Iran, as we have seen in recent days, are obviously very different.

Gareth Porter is an investigative historian and journalist specializing in U.S. national security policy. The paperback edition of his latest book, *Perils of Dominance: Imbalance of Power and the Road to War in Vietnam*, was published in 2006.

Where Romney/Paul Money Trails Cross

The political press corps has puzzled over the strange “bromance” between Republican presidential rivals Mitt Romney and Ron Paul, with all sorts of speculation about why Paul has gone so soft on Romney. However, Mark Ames suggests that perhaps a good place to look is where their financial backers cross, in Salt Lake City.

By Mark Ames

Last week, it finally started to dawn on the slow-as-Stegosaurus media: Why is Ron Paul going so soft on frontrunner Mitt Romney, his natural ideological opposite? Dr. Paul has been flaying every other candidate, particularly when that candidate threatens Romney’s front-runner status, why is Ron Paul so protective over the internationalist/neocon/Rockefeller Republican, Mitt Romney?

Does this point to some sort of alliance between the two? And if so, doesn’t that raise further disturbing questions about the supposed rock-solid-principles guiding Ron Paul’s campaign? You’d expect by now that the media alerted to this “bizarre” alliance, might think that the answer to this riddle lies in finding a possible money trail linking the two campaigns’ interests together. This is politics after all; stranger things have happened.

Naturally this hasn’t happened; but if the hacks did get around to following the money, they would very quickly stumble across one of the most blatantly bizarre factoids to emerge so far this primary season: Ron Paul’s SuperPAC, “Endorse Liberty,” is headquartered in Mitt Romney’s backyard: Salt Lake City, Utah.

Moreover, the SuperPAC’s staff and founders include several former Romney supporters and Huntsman supporters. And one of the founding principals of

Endorse Liberty, Ladd Christensen, is something of an oligarch in Utah: Christensen is the longtime business partner of John Huntsman's billionaire dad. They founded Huntsman Chemicals together, as well as Huntsman-Christensen.

Huntsman endorsed Mitt Romney when the former ambassador to China bowed out of the GOP race, in fact, Huntsman has a history of stepping aside for Mitt Romney and playing his second banana, going back at least to the Salt Lake City Olympics in 2002, which John's billionaire dad helped to fund on behalf of Mitt Romney.

So to repeat: Ron Paul's SuperPAC is based in Salt Lake City, and one of the founders is Ladd Christensen, John Huntsman's business partner in Huntsman-Christensen and Huntsman Chemicals. *Nothing to see here folks, keep moving along*

That might raise some potentially disturbing possibilities to a journalist or editor still interested in chasing down disturbing details and stories. Which probably explains why the media hacks aren't interested in pursuing this possible angle, even though it's staring them in the face.

Instead, they're trotting out a catalogue of fatuous "explanations" for the love-fest between Dr. Paul and Mitt Romney, explanations which have almost nothing to do with money and sleaze in politics, and everything to do with how *Tiger Beat* magazine (an American fan publication marketed to adolescent girls) might approach this election campaign.

The *New York Times* opined that the Libertarian hero's alliance with the Rockefeller Republican is all about their wives. It even has a Spielberg-esque headline "Amid Rivalry, Friendship Blossoms on the Campaign Trail" designed to make everyone feel all warm inside about how American politics works. And wouldn'tcha know it, politics it turns out works just like in the sitcoms:

"The candidates' spouses, Ann Romney and Carol Paul, 'know each other better than any of the other wives,' Mr. Paul said. He and Mr. Romney talk 'all the time' and 'we've met all their kids.' Once he telephoned Mr. Romney just as Mr. Romney was calling him. 'Sometimes I'm never sure who issued a call,' he said.

"Mr. Paul has already provided some tactical help: When Mr. Romney began to flounder in South Carolina and was under attack over his career in leveraged buyouts, Mr. Paul came to his defense, suggesting that his critics were anticapitalist. His campaign even issued a press release assailing other rivals for, in Mr. Paul's view, taking Mr. Romney's quote about firing people out of context."

In other words, if you've seen *The Flintstones* or *The Honeymooners*, that's all the background you need to understand the deep politics of Ron Paul's strange

alliance with his ideological foe and primary opponent, Mitt Romney.

Not to be out-dumbed, the Washington Post also explored Dr. Paul's touching friendship with the silver-spoon Mormon frontrunner, and found a life-affirming story about Americans from different sides of the railroad tracks coming together by finding how much they had in common deep down. The *Post's* Hollywood rom-con story was headlined "For Romney and Paul, a strategic alliance between establishment and outsider" and it featured deep insights like:

"Despite deep differences on a range of issues, Romney and Paul became friends in 2008, the last time both ran for president. So did their wives, Ann Romney and Carol Paul. The former Massachusetts governor compliments the Texas congressman during debates, praising Paul's religious faith during the last one, in Jacksonville, Fla. Immediately afterward, as is often the case, the Pauls and the Romneys gravitated toward one another to say hello."

Wrong-about-everything guy Charles Krauthammer assures America that although "they are objectively allies" nevertheless "it's not because it's a conspiracy or collusion or because, people will say, the wives are close." Anyone familiar with Krauthammer's record should as a matter of reflex automatically assume it's a conspiracy and it's all because their wives are close. (A question for Krauthammer: How is it possible that there can be an "alliance" involving no collusion? Stupid question, I know.)

To be fair to Krauthammer (not that anyone should be), he advances a more "reasonable" dumbshit-theory than the Wilma:Betty/Ann:Carol wives theory: According to Krauthammer and some others, the Paul-Romney love-fest is all about making Ron Paul the "Number Two" guy in the Republican Party. As if this is something Ron Paul and Mitt Romney work out on their own, without the massive powerful interests behind them, or the Republican Party machine, or anyone, just a couple of guys with some homespun desires and their wives in tow.

Give MSNBC's Joe Scarborough some credit at least: He at least isn't buying the bullshit and demanding answers about the "bizarre" alliance between Paul and Romney:

"The thing that went unspoken but everybody knows, and that is that Mitt Romney and Ron Paul have formed an alliance," Scarborough said. "It is such an obvious alliance that Mitt Romney would do well to just come out and admit it. I don't know what he's promised Ron Paul. I don't know if Ron Paul is hoping that his son gets in the administration. But let's just be really honest here, for all the people for Ron Paul to form an alliance with in the Republican Party, to pick out Mitt Romney is really bizarre." Indeed.

One can argue that the Romney-Paul alliance everyone's talking about can be explained by heartwarming personal relationships, or by the laughable hope that Rand Paul will be put on the Romney ticket, or by the sort of vague idea that by playing favorites, Dr. Paul will become the "number two" in the party.

But that doesn't make a lot of sense, Ronald Reagan didn't become the "number two" in 1976 by treating Gerald Ford with kid gloves; nor did George Bush Sr. in 1980, when he coined the phrase "voodoo economics" thrashing Reagan. It's possible, monkeys exuent ex-buttium-Ronius Paulius is also possible, but it's certainly not logical.

Another possibility, as I suggested, is money/oligarchy. You know, those things we all agree now that control our politics. That is why I would suggest that while there may be nothing to it at all, the fact that Ron Paul's SuperPAC is headquartered in Salt Lake City, Utah, you know, the capital of Mormonstan, where Romney's power and influence runs, as you might imagine, fairly strong.

Of all the places in the United States isn't it a little bit odd that the Ron Paul SuperPAC is based in Mitt Romney's backyard? Is it really so much to ask the media, all abuzz about the Romney-Paul alliance, to appropriate just a tiny bit of their resources into real investigative journalism, rather than more of the same fatuous, shallow celebrity-magazine fluff?

A few more details to consider here, in case you're curious and not satisfied with the "our wives made us do it" theory:

* Ron Paul's SuperPAC sugar daddy, Peter Thiel, whom I wrote about for The Nation, has a proven track record of using his money to play the cynical game of politics. According to a recent San Francisco Chronicle profile, "libertarian" Peter Thiel is funding a Democrat and former Obama trade official, Ro Khanna, in a primary challenge against anti-war, anti-PATRIOT Act liberal Democrat Congressman Pete Stark.

* Ron Paul's SuperPAC sugar daddy Peter Thiel also funds other candidates supposedly anathema to antiwar, anti-PATRIOT Act, pro-gay marriage libertarians, including frothing pro-war GOP social conservatives Dana Rohrabacher, Ed Royce and Dan Lungren.

* Dr. Paul's SuperPAC sugar daddy Thiel also donated the maximum allowable to the 2010 gubernatorial campaign of Meg Whitman, who was Mitt Romney's campaign finance chair in 2008. Whitman was a protege of Romney's when she worked at Bain capital; later, when Whitman was CEO of eBay, she made Peter Thiel rich when she bought out his PayPal in a deal roundly slammed as bad for eBay, but good for Thiel and Whitman.

Look, I'm just laying out some interesting leads here for journalists with budgets, leads that involve money and oligarchy in politics, someone out there with an expense account, do your work! Sure, there may be nothing there, heck, it may have been Dr. Paul's wife who suggested to Mrs. Romney what a wonderful idea it would be to base Paul's SuperPAC in Salt Lake City.

But if the media is willing to raise the question about the strange and rather unnerving alliance, it should be willing to look in strange places for unsettling answers.

Mark Ames is editor of The eXiled Online and author of the book Going Postal: Rage, Murder and Rebellion from Reagan's Workplaces to Clinton's Columbine and co-author with Matt Taibbi of The eXile: Sex, Drugs and Libel in the New Russia.

The 'Winners' Take Everything

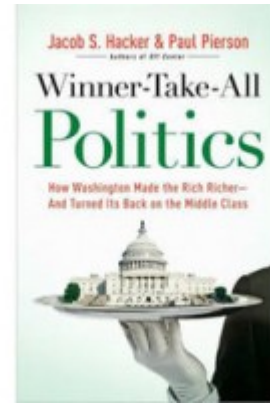
Exclusive: Many Americans still wonder how it happened, how did a country admired for its Great Middle Class, which sustained strong democratic institutions, end up with Third-World-style wealth inequality and a democracy to match? In reviewing *Winner-Take-All Politics*, James DiEugenio seeks an answer.

By James DiEugenio

In the last year or so, I have been contemplating writing a book about President Barack Obama and how he reacted to the economic blowout of 2007-08, compared to how President Franklin Roosevelt grappled with the Great Depression.

In that comparison, I thought, one could gauge not only the character and politics of the two men, but also how the Democratic Party had lost its way and why. After all, Obama said on *60 Minutes* that – prior to taking office but after being elected – he had read several books about FDR and the Depression in

preparation for handling a similar collapse.



Winner-Take-All Politics, the book under discussion in this review, strictly speaking, does not fit under the rubric of the Wall Street collapse at the end of George W. Bush's presidency. But it takes pains to describe why Obama and the Democratic Party could not mount the kind of program necessary to revive the economy.

And consequently, why, in 2012, five years after the first phase of the collapse, many Americans still find themselves in the throes of this recession, an economic disaster which, unlike any since the Great Depression, has impacted almost every aspect of American public life: cutbacks in municipal and state services and employment, teacher layoffs which have raised some student class sizes to well over 40, a collapse in real-estate prices in many states, leading to a foreclosure and bankruptcy rate that has been unprecedented.

For instance, in the state of Florida, the abandonment rate of homes and condominiums is over 15 percent. That is, the rate of occupiers who have simply walked away from their dwellings and left them empty. And Nevada is not very far behind. Further, there is no end in sight to this housing debacle, which many people think is the key to reviving the economy.

How It Happened

The authors of *Winner-Take-All Politics*, Jacob Hacker and Paul Pierson, have put together a thesis that tries to tell the great untold story of the last 30 odd years. That is, how did the redistribution of wealth in this country become so concentrated in the highest echelons, to the point that, in the wake of the collapse, the middle class, or what is left of it, simply does not have the purchasing power to recharge the economy?

Hacker and Pierson spend the first part of the book proving this is so. And they do that in a very convincing manner, through an array of statistical charts that show that the concentration of wealth today is at a point unsurpassed since the Gilded Age, the Age of the Robber Barons – like Jay Gould, Cornelius Vanderbilt,

J. P. Morgan and John Rockefeller Sr. – the days when there was no middle class and when these men essentially owned the government through outright bribery.

That was also a time when there were no strong unions to hold the Robber Barons in check. There also were no real laws regulating banking and the stock market. Because of all this, the Robber Barons were allowed to do as they wished with no regard to anyone else. According to Teddy Roosevelt, they even arranged economic downturns to hurt presidents who were opposed to their total dominion. There really was no democracy, since elections were bought and sold.

As notorious Republican campaign manager Mark Hanna once said, “The single most important thing about winning elections is money. I forgot the second thing.” Therefore in the key election of 1896, Hanna backed William McKinley against the full-throated populist William Jennings Bryan, who crisscrossed the country by train, hitting as many as four cities in a day. McKinley sat on his front porch with his mother and wife, while Hanna brought the media to him. Bryan got more votes than any previous candidate for president, but McKinley still won.

What Hacker and Pierson are arguing here is that, for all intents and purposes, the USA is now back in the Gilded Age. Even though we have a president who is a Democrat, and even though Democrats control the Senate, it does not matter. The intent of the book is to show why the top 1 percent really does not care about party affiliation.

Flooding the Rich with Money

The authors say the real story behind the bail-out begun by George W. Bush and completed by Barack Obama was not the amount delegated to TARP (with its original \$700 billion price tag though later scaled back considerably). That was just the amount handed over in daylight. The amount handed over secretly, through the Federal Reserve (an amount estimated in the trillions of dollars), dwarfed TARP.

The excuse of these combined bailouts was “to save the system,” but the appearance was that the money was going into the wallets of Wall Street swindlers who had created the crisis in the first place. Rather than suffering for their greed and recklessness, they simply were allowed to get to their feet and dust off their top hats or rather have the taxpayer dust off their top hats.

But the authors explain this galling reality as part of a longer-term favoritism toward the wealthy. They ask, “Why have politicians slashed taxes on the rich even as the riches of the rich have exploded?” (p. 5)

This is one of the main tenets of the book. As the Wall Street denizens had their taxes lowered, they also successfully lobbied to be deregulated, a process

that, in turn, caused the collapse. But then, because of their lobbying connections, they were bailed out of the consequences of their own actions, mostly with tax money from the dwindling middle class which has had to shoulder a larger share of the tax burden or watch the costs get passed on to future generations.

To compound the injury inflicted by the rapaciousness of the rich, the middle class also has suffered disproportionately from the severe recession: the widespread layoffs, the stagnating wages, the loss of home values and the decline in public services. A key point of the book for Hacker and Pierson is to figure out how democracy got so undemocratic.

Not Always This Way

Hacker and Pierson compare the contemporary economic scene to America after World War II. From about 1945 to about 1975 the American economic system was much more evenly balanced, both in taxes and in wealth. (p. 11) In those years, overall, the benefits of the economy were distributed more to the middle class and working class than to the upper classes. (p. 15) This changed dramatically from 1979 to 2006, when the top 1 percent received 36 percent of all the income growth generated in the American economy. (p. 290)

The authors then bring out an economic study which shows just how this curve was reshaped in the last 30 or so years. For example, in 1974, the top 1 percent earned 8 percent of the income. In 2007, that more than doubled to 18 percent. If one includes capital gains and dividends, that rate goes up to 23.5 percent. So 1 per cent of the population was getting almost one-quarter of the wealth. Since these records were recorded, beginning in 1918, in only one year has this distribution been more extreme: in 1928, the year before the great Wall Street Crash of 1929, it was 24 percent.

The authors then dissected what was happening inside the 1 percent by examining the top one-tenth of the 1 percent. This group now averages \$7.1 million per year in income, yet in 1974, they averaged \$1 million per year, or to put it as a percentage, in 1974, the top 0.1 percent earned 2.7 percent of the nation's income, while in 2007, they earned 12.3 percent, a huge statistical increase.

Then, the authors go one better. They break down what the top one-hundredth of the top one per cent earns. In 1974, it was \$4 million per year. In 2007, it was \$35 million per year, which is the highest rate in recorded history. (All these figures are adjusted for inflation, p. 16)

Putting these gains on a graph, the concentration of wealth in the hands of the top 1 percent has more than doubled from the Kennedy/Johnson years to the last

years of George W. Bush. (p. 18) Or as the authors put it, America has gone from a nation in which most of our growth went to the bottom 90 percent, to one in which more than half that growth goes to the richest 1 percent. And this acceleration has been sustained over three decades, not significantly altered by the business cycle or who occupies the White House.

The One Percent Paradigm

The theoretical underpinning of this enrich-the-rich paradigm was first postulated back in the 1920s by Treasury Secretary Andrew Mellon, himself one of the key Robber Barons of the Gilded Age. In the 1970s, Arthur Laffer recast it as “supply-side economics” for Ronald Reagan, who as president proceeded to slash the top marginal tax rates on the rich by more than half.

In comparing incomes adjusted for inflation (and for benefits from employment), the authors conclude that the magic elixir of Mellon and Laffer has not worked as advertised, that is, it did not create an economy that broadly boosts living standards by having the wealth trickle down. To the degree that this paradigm has worked at all, it’s worked for the upper classes, not the middle classes, and certainly not for the poor and working class. (p. 20) The standard of living for the latter two groups has gone down.

Plus, there are more Americans in the lower-income groups, and the only way the middle class has avoided taking a major hit is, unlike the Sixties, most middle-class families have both parents working.

To put it another way, from 1979 to 2006, the top 1 percent saw a gain of 256 percent in their after-tax income. (p. 23) No other percentile even approached that rise. The second highest gain was the top 20 percent with a 55 percent rise. In other words, trickle-down economics was really trickle-up. Or, as Reagan’s disillusioned budget director David Stockman said, supply-side economics was a gift of a Trojan horse from the wealthy to everyone else.

At this point, the authors stop and zoom in for a very dramatic comparison. They ask: What if they altered the chart by using the rate of wealth distribution that existed in the Sixties? How would the wealthy be doing then, versus everyone else, (sort of an *It’s a Wonderful Life* alternative reality, speculating on how the various classes would have done if “supply-side” or “trickle-down” economics” had never been born)?

This one graph, more than any page in the book, shows us how the political system has been turned upside down. For if the Sixties’ rate of wealth distribution were applied, today’s top 1 percent would see a decline in their annual income by more than 50 percent! The income of the top 10 percent would

drop by about 12 percent, and everyone else would gain significantly. For instance, the middle fifth would see a rise in income of about 16 percent.

Skewed Wealth

But today's reality is quite different. There is no way around it: America has become a country with one of the most skewed rates of wealth distribution in the Western world. (p. 28) And it has happened in the last three decades, under the doctrine of supply-side economics.

According to the authors, the worst time period for this economic imbalance was the presidency of George W. Bush, under whom the rise in income for the top 1 percent went up on average about 10 per cent a year. As if they really needed the money!

Also, contrary to supply-side propaganda, trickle-down policies have not created a dynamic meritocracy that rewards the enterprise of the hardworking downtrodden who then soar into the upper classes. Instead, social mobility in the United States has stagnated. Today, there is much more opportunity to climb the economic ladder in other Western countries, like Australia, Sweden, Norway, Germany, Spain, France and Canada. In fact, the only two countries that have a worse mobility rate than the U.S. are England and Italy, whose rates are just slightly lower. (p. 29)

Even benefit packages for employees have worsened as a result of trickle-up economics. Employers today give much less to retirement packages than in the Seventies, and Americans pay much more for health insurance than, in say, Canada, while getting less in return. (p. 31) And today, the ratio of people not covered by health insurance is higher than in 1979.

After producing all this impressive data, the authors conclude that America has the worst income inequality in the industrial world. (p. 37) In fact, in the last 30 years, the United States has literally left its cohorts in the dust in this dubious category.

How Did It Happen?

So, how did this remarkable transformation happen? The book offers three main reasons:

–The gifts given to the rich in taxes and benefits.

–What the writers call “drift,” the inability of government to adapt to a new economic landscape.

–The freeing up of market regulations while minimum wage laws and the ability of

unions to provide a check on corporate power were lessened.

In regards to the gifts to the rich, *Winner-Take-All Politics* contains a very telling chart about who has benefited the most from the lessening of stock market restrictions. This depicts the occupations of those within the top one-tenth of the 1 per cent.

Over 40 per cent of these people are from the world of corporate managers and CEOs who have benefited as rules limiting compensation, such as stock options, were gutted, especially in comparison to other countries. The next largest group, about 20 percent, is from the financial speculation sector, or Wall Street.

No other group has even 7 percent representation. (p. 46) In other words, while much of American business has been declining, corporate chieftains and investment bankers have become, by far, the most well-off personages in American society.

Gutting Progressive Taxation

One way this transformation has occurred was the gutting of the idea of progressive taxes. Today, the top 1 percent pays a full third less in taxes than in 1970. The top tenth of that 1 percent pay less than half of what they did then. In other words, the rich do not just get a larger cut of the pie, they pay less for it. (p. 48)

The steep progressivity of the American income tax code, which existed from the post-World War II era through the start of the Reagan era, is gone today. The 90 percent rate applied to the top tranche of a rich person's income in the 1950s was trimmed to 70 percent in the 1960s, but the biggest change occurred in the last 30 years, resulting from the Reagan tax cuts of the 1980s which lowered the top rate to 28 percent (before they were raised somewhat under George H.W. Bush and Bill Clinton and then dropped again by George W. Bush).

The supposed goal of Reagan's tax cuts was to spur the economy by having the rich invest more in the productive sector and thus create more jobs, with the benefits then trickling down to working people. But the tax cutting spree mostly diverted the nation's wealth into the hands of the upper classes without achieving the promised productive investments inside the United States.

Not only did Reagan's tax cuts help out rich people who *didn't need the help*, but many of the investments that the upper classes did make went to finance overseas factories that exploited cheaper labor and caused more unemployment for working-class Americans. Those lost jobs, in turn, put more pressure on cities and towns – with shuttered factories, decaying neighborhoods and depressed U.S.

living standards.

In terms of numbers, the authors described it this way: the total after-tax income of the top tenth of 1 percent was 1.2 percent of the national total in 1970. In 2000, it was 7.3 percent. Yet if the tax rate had remained the same as it was in 1970, that figure would decline to 4.5 percent. In other words, the gulf in inequality would be much narrower. And the government would have much more revenue to spend reviving the American economy and putting teachers and policemen back to work.

Undemocratic Results

What is so remarkable about this skewing of benefits to the rich is that the majority of Americans don't agree with the idea of simply letting the rich have more of the nation's wealth. In 2007, even before the Wall Street crash that required the unpopular TARP bailout, 56 percent of the public believed that the government should redistribute wealth by imposing taxes on the rich. (p. 50) But it's not happening, not by a long shot.

One reason that the tax code has been all but gutted of progressivity is that the political and social counterweight of union membership has declined so much. Indeed, among private businesses it has all but collapsed. In 1947, in the wake of Franklin Roosevelt's union-building policies, one in every three Americans was in a union. Today that figure is one in nine. But in the private sector it is even worse, at 7 per cent . (p. 56)

And as we have seen of late, the Koch brothers and other wealthy Americans are investing in politicians and policies with the intent to eliminate the last bastion of union membership, public sector unions.

Yet, historically speaking, unions have been a powerful balance to the power of corporate money in Washington. Unions were one of the few groups interested in things like health care, pensions and adequate pay, in other words the standard of living for average people. As the authors point out, it is no coincidence that as the influence of unions has waned, the upper classes have become a political juggernaut.

Again, *Winner-Take-All Politics* makes a telling comparison. This steep decline in U.S. union membership is not matched in other Westernized countries. For example, in Canada and the European Union, union membership has slipped very little in recent years.

And, the book points out that American public opinion isn't onboard with the marginalizing of unions. In a 2005 poll, more than half of the respondents in the non-unionized private sector replied that they wanted to be in a union. In

1984, that number was 30 percent.

Reagan's Union-busting

The authors note here the great public milestone in union-busting: Reagan's firing of the air traffic controllers in 1981. But they also note that Reagan began to stack the National Labor Relations Board, which is supposed to assure fair play in union-company relations, with pro-management people. The NLRB then began to accept more company dodges to union organizing and reduced fines for abusive management tactics.

As a consequence, organizing in the private sector has become much more expensive for unions, one reason organizing has now spread more to the public sector, explaining why the Koch brothers are now taking aim there.

Another way that the corporate managers have weakened unions is with "right-to-work" laws passed by state governments, preventing "union shops" where all workers must join the union. By ensuring weaker unions with fewer dues-paying members, "right-to-work" states, especially in the South, have attracted businesses seeking cheaper and more compliant workers.

The bottom line for this three-decade-long "class war" has been the increasing disparity between what the average worker makes versus what the average CEO makes. In 1965, that CEO made 24 times what the worker made. Today, the CEO makes 300 times what the average worker makes.

And again, this huge disparity ratio is not prevalent in other countries, where unions have organized to monitor executive pay and pushed back against huge increases in compensation packages. (p. 65) In the United States, however, top executives have faced much less pressure against lavishly rewarding themselves with the help of friendly corporate board committees.

Another way companies have weakened American unions is by getting out of U.S. manufacturing and conducting domestic operations that have very little union influence. For example, in 1980, General Electric derived 90 percent of its profits from manufacturing. In 2007, GE got over 50 percent of its profits from its financial business, which was much more lucrative for managers since there was so little regulation as to what they could do and there was even less of it as time went by.

Making Money with Money

In the financial sector, potential rewards were staggering. For example, in 2002, a hedge fund manager had to make \$30 million a year to be in the top 25 in his field. In 2005, just three years later, he had to make \$130 million to be on

that list. In 2007, just two more years later, the top 25 hedge fund managers averaged over \$360 million a year.

That “greed-is-good” philosophy was driving the markets headlong into the crash of late 2007 and 2008 when the losses far exceeded profits of previous years. (p. 67) Just north of the U.S. border, Canada, with much stronger laws on real estate and stock market transactions, Canada did not endure anything like the economic meltdown in America. (p. 68)

Hacker and Pierson also address the corollary to the concentration of wealth in the United States, the concentration of political power that money makes possible.

The health of a nation’s democracy tracks closely to the distribution of wealth, a point that Walter Lippmann made in 1914 in his book *Drift and Mastery*, a book that was one of the hallmarks of the Progressive Era arguing that without a strong push-back to concentrations of wealth, society as a whole suffers and the quality of life declines.

Hacker and Pierson identify the political reform part of FDR’s New Deal as a model of reaction to a concentration of wealth and power, like what existed prior to the 1929 crash and helped cause it. (p. 88) This political reform program also strengthened the image of the Democratic Party among average people.

Roosevelt did not just look at the Great Depression as an economic collapse, but also as a political collapse, a failure of government to rein in the unmitigated greed of the upper classes. The authors call this understanding the politics of renewal, an approach that began to sprout in the Progressive Era of the early 20th Century and flowered from the New Deal and into the Kennedy-Johnson era of the 1960s.

But this recognition of government’s vital role in assuring a fair shake for the average American began to fade away amid the economic struggles of the 1970s and nearly disappeared under an avalanche of Reagan’s anti-government rhetoric of the 1980s. A resurgence of this reform movement has yet to emerge, even as the upper classes have looted the country.

Lost Opportunity

The authors argue that Obama had the perfect opportunity to initiate such a renewal upon his election, but they imply that he failed to do it. I would be more forthright. I would say he utterly failed to do it. (p. 90)

Much of the rest of the book explores why there has been no politics of renewal

to counteract the runaway upper classes. Though interesting, this part of the book is not as solid as the earlier sections. Hacker and Pierson are fine social scientists, but here they put on more of an historian's hat and identify the rise of an invisible Third Party, consisting of giant lobbying houses that rose in the late Seventies, exemplified by Jack Abramoff's influence-buying scandal.

As an historian myself, I found most of this useful but I disagreed with some of the analysis. For instance, the authors say that the imbalance between the upper classes and everyone else did not really begin with what most people consider the historical milestone of 1968, i.e. the assassination of Martin Luther King, then Robert F. Kennedy and the election of Richard Nixon. They chart the beginning as the famous letter by Lewis Powell in 1971 when the future Supreme Court justice told America's corporate chieftains that the "American economic system is under broad attack" and that this attack demanded a response.

"Business must learn the lesson," Powell wrote, "that political power is necessary; that such power must be assiduously cultivated; and that when necessary, it must be used aggressively and with determination without embarrassment and without the reluctance which has been so characteristic of American business." (p. 117)

The authors argue that Powell's call to arms started a powerful march by business interests to establish PR centers in Washington and gave rise to the lobbying giants of today, what is now a \$3 billion a year industry known as K Street. Powell wrote his memo apparently as a response to Ralph Nader's then effective role as a consumer advocate behind Citizen Action.

Giant War Chests

As Corporate America built up its Washington army, the number of registered lobbyists grew from less than 500 in 1970 to over 2,500 in 1982. (p. 118) Huge business organizations also sprang up, like the Business Roundtable. (p. 120)

Labor unions found themselves outgunned in campaigns. An alliance between Big Business and Republican National Chairman Bill Brock (1976-1981) enabled the targeting of key Democratic members of Congress, especially in the South where Republicans exploited white resentment against desegregation and other programs aimed at helping disadvantaged blacks.

The business-oriented groups also began searching for more conservative Republicans to run against what they perceived as moderates. Key figures in this phase were Richard Nixon's Treasury Secretary William Simon and neoconservative war hawk Irving Kristol. Both highly combative, Simon came from the business world and Kristol from intellectual circles. In the same time

frame, well-founded conservative think tanks emerged, like the American Enterprise Institute.

The first target of this new alliance was Jimmy Carter's attempt to get a bill through Congress to make it easier to organize unions. It was defeated by a powerful political drive fronted by Sens. Richard Lugar, R-Indiana, and Orrin Hatch, R-Utah. Later, Carter's tax bill was changed to reduce the capital gains tax rate from 48 percent to 28 percent. (pgs. 131-34)

Winner-Take-All Politics argues that the Democrats, rather than fighting this new system of organized money, chose to imitate the Republicans by joining in the money chase. That approach left the middle class even more an orphan of the political system. For instance, Rep. Tony Coelho, D-California, became the Democrat's chief emissary in pursuit of Wall Street donations.

After Reagan's 1984 landslide win over Walter Mondale, Democrats created the Democratic Leadership Council (DLC), a think tank that sought to reposition the party in the "center" on defense and spending issues. The men who formed this group were largely southern Democrats who would soon dominate the party, including Rep. Dick Gephardt of Missouri, Sen. Al Gore of Tennessee, Gov. Bill Clinton of Arkansas, and Sen. Chuck Robb of Virginia.

What made the DLC's influence even greater was the continuing decline in the size and influence of unions. Thus, Democrats began to support pro-business issues like "free trade" and NAFTA. In filling key government jobs, President Clinton turned to the same stable of Wall Street investment bankers that the Republicans traditionally relied upon, such as Goldman Sachs chairman Robert Rubin to be Treasury Secretary. The culminating image was probably Hillary Clinton's service on the board of Wal-Mart. Angry voters at the polls might understandably think, "Who do we shoot?" (p. 286)

Meanwhile, other Democratic groups that sprang up focused on narrower issues, like EMILY's List seeking to bolster the number of pro-choice women in elected government positions. These organizations contributed to a view of the Democratic Party that was becoming a collection of sub-groups promoting narrower issues, rather than a party predominantly fighting for the working and middle classes.

Pro-Business Democrats

With the Democratic Party redefining itself as more "pro-business," Sen. Phil Gramm of Texas, a onetime-conservative-Democrat-turned-Republican, could pass one of the longtime heart-throb issues of the GOP, the effective repeal of the Glass-Steagall, a law from the New Deal that separated investment banking from

commercial banking. The goal of Glass-Steagall was to ensure that if Wall Street crashed again, it would not take down the banks where small investors entrusted their money.

Amid the “boom” economy of the late 1990s, Gramm convinced majorities in Congress and key economic advisers to President Clinton that it was time to “modernize” American banking laws by jettisoning much of Glass-Steagall.

Then, Gramm went further. In 2000, he shepherded through the Commodity Futures Modernization Act, which essentially freed up the creation and trading of derivatives from any kind of real regulation. Indeed, if any single bill caused the crash of 2008, it was this one. After leaving the Senate in 2002, Gramm and his wife then made millions of dollars as financial sector consultants and lobbyists. (p. 198)

This analysis by Hacker and Pierson is a useful one and has some truth to it. But I would disagree with any historical survey which discounts the effects of Richard Nixon on a disintegrating polity. For example, the authors make much of the GOP power base in the South, yet it was Nixon who fostered the Southern Strategy to attract working-class whites to the GOP through thinly veiled appeals to racial animosities. There was also the political polarization caused by the divisive Vietnam War.

I also would question any analysis that does not mention the Democratic drift under Jimmy Carter in the late 1970s. Party stalwarts like Arthur Schlesinger and Tip O’Neill found Carter’s lack of passion for traditional party ideals like full employment and universal health insurance problematic. In fact, that was why Sen. Ted Kennedy ran against Carter in 1980. Kennedy did not think such a colorless leader could galvanize the Democratic base enough to defeat an ideological candidate like Reagan.

The authors mention the assassinations of leading progressives but only briefly. However, wouldn’t the likes of King, RFK and Malcolm X have fought the corporate greed as it sought to take over the political system? At the time of his death in 1968, King was preparing the Poor People’s March on Washington. I also question the book’s failure to assess the impact of political smear specialists like Terry Dolan and NCPAC in clearing the way for Ronald Reagan’s 1980 victory.

What Next?

At the end in recommending a way back from the current catastrophe, *Winner-Take-All Politics* seems to suggest that Obama and the Democratic Party need to curtail the ability of elites to block progressive change (as in reforming the filibuster); to facilitate more participation at the ballot box (by increasing

voter turnout); and to encourage development of middle-class groups (to energize the political process).

The last point has already been more or less accomplished through the rise of the liberal blogosphere, but the vehicle would remain the compromised Democratic Party.

I disagree with this limited agenda. One of the great opportunities that the blogosphere had when it arose at the beginning of the millennium was to create a new opening with a new political potency and a new way of raising money. But the choice was: Do we try to reform a Democratic Party that has been corrupted to the point that it is now GOP-Lite? Or do we back an alternative to the Democrats thereby putting pressure on them not to rush to the center?

People like Markos Moulitsas, Arianna Huffington and Jane Hamsher chose the former and so far the results have been meager, as far as I can see. In my view, the choice should have been the latter, an independent-minded movement that puts external pressure on the Democrats not to cave.

That would have been a real politics of renewal. And the platform could be informed by the first section of this book regarding the huge transfer of wealth from the middle to upper classes. In that way, this new movement or party would have preceded Occupy Wall Street, although as a more organized, less guerrilla-style uprising, though just as threatening to the entrenched classes.

Still, *Winner-Take-All Politics* explains what went wrong with America and it offers a persuasive diagnosis that can inform anyone who believes in the necessity of taking action toward rebuilding a strong middle-class democracy.

James DiEugenio is a researcher and writer on the assassination of President John F. Kennedy and other mysteries of that era.

Regaining a Spirit of Defiance

When kids scramble to buy the latest Nike running shoe, they're mocked for their consumerism; yet, when Mitt Romney mentions his wife's Cadillacs and other one-percenters tool around in their luxury autos, they're admired for their success – a commentary on America's crisis, writes Phil Rockstroh.

By Phil Rockstroh

The course of action taken by the present-day U.S. political class in addressing

the era's rising tide of economic hardship and ecological peril has proven as helpful as tossing an anvil to a drowning man.

The following two, axiomatic headlines reveal much about the dovetailing mindsets manifested by members of both the drowning class and the moral compass-bereft captains of the ship of state:

"Nike Foamposite Galaxy Shoe Spurs Frenzy At Malls" (Associated Press, Feb. 25, 2012)

"Mitt Romney: Wife Ann Drives 'A Couple Of Cadillacs'" (The Washington Post, Feb. 24, 2012)

Inadvertently, Mr. Romney's declaration, stated in his own blandly deranged way, captures the As Above/So Below nature of consumer-state psychology. By means of incessant, womb to tomb, commercial propaganda, the corporate class has promoted the idea that an individual's identity is based solely on the sum total of his worldly possessions.

Yet, when young people, denied a decent education and stranded in circumstances where they have been deprived of a means to gain a sense of identity by acquiring the skills and the development of the talents necessary for the pursuit of their individual aspirations, have the temerity to reflect the societal values they have internalized – for example, by acting in an aggressive manner in a mindless pursuit of material items that they have been conditioned to believe will bestow a sense of self worth – then media elites and bamboozled bourgeois should not, as they can be counted on to do, react with consternation, carrying on as if these acts of desperation on the part of the young are wholly devoid of any cultural context.

A defining trait of declining civilizations: A yawning, unbridgeable chasm develops between the ability to connect cause and effect e.g., between the excesses of the privileged and powerful (apropos, a multi-millionaire, presidential candidate's braggadocio involving the multiple ownership of luxury automobiles) and the causative effect that evincing such an arrogant and self-serving worldview exerts on the actions of the so-called underclasses.

As a consequence, a demeaning view of the world – and of themselves – has been instilled within the young: According to the internalized cosmology of the consumer state, individuals, sans materialist signifiers, register as non entities.

When the one percent crash the global economy and loot national treasuries, this is termed the neoliberal economic model, but rowdy behavior, including the coveting of relentlessly hyped athletic shoes by a few of the least powerful

denizens of the consumer state, evokes waves of condemnation.

Existing in a culture that robs people of self-respect by countenancing the ongoing crime wave, perpetrated by the one percent, we should not be shocked when those born bereft of privilege, at times, conduct themselves in a less than polite fashion.

The emptiness of consumer state existence leaves many so wanting for purpose and identity that, in their confusion, they seek meaning at a mall. Lost in endlessly proffered distractions, swooning in the negative enchantment of the commercial hologram, it is no mystery why so many in the general population of the U.S. cannot approach, neither on an emotional nor intellectual level, the dire situation presented by, for example, feedback loops of escaping methane gas now active in the Arctic, Siberia and the Gulf of Mexico, and the manner that this manmade phenomenon imperils their own survival.

In this regard, predictions of doom are not the stuff of dour old men, afflicted with Cassandra complexes, long, unkempt beards flapping, as they hector passersby with gloomy auguries of a rapidly arriving "time of reckoning" – when what they mean is, their libido is waning, and it feels to them like the end of the world.

No, this is truly bad news. And if these effects of climate chaos are not mitigated and begin to be reversed – and soon – then there will come, in the not too distant future, mass suffering, in the form of a great die-off, on a scale almost impossible to envisage.

We're talking peer-reviewed scientific inquiry not crank-speak here. These are extraordinarily dangerous circumstances.

The cultural, social and political arrangements that have created this approaching catastrophe must be radically confronted and changed. Accordingly, the times call for extraordinary action. Business as usual will constitute a death march.

Not being an advocate for the dreariness intrinsic to compulsive self-denial, I accept the need for almost all forms of human excess ... with the exception of those actions and pursuits that are deliberately cruel, belligerently ignorant, and sadistically or mindlessly destructive.

You can pursue excess to the point of collapse, as far as I'm concerned, just don't harm any innocent bystanders or leave others to cleanup your mess.

These forms of excess are anathema: the agendas of the corporate/consumer state that are reducing the spicy resonance of the global agora into a bland shopping

mall food court, and demand excessive work hours and debt slavery to maintain the system; overfishing that has reduced the stocks of large fish in the world's oceans by 90 percent; the carbon footprint, created by excessive industrialization, that has become an iron boot on the neck of all living things; the commercial/ entertainment/public relations/advertising complex, specializing in endless self-referential spectacle, that offers neither revelation nor cathartic release; the defining traits of our present economic system which are identical to the actions and attendant rationalizations of an addict on a death-besotted bender desperate, joyless, and devoid of the shared sublime of a communal bacchanal.

The Road of Excess might lead to the Palace of Wisdom but one cannot arrive there by modern jet travel or by any interstate highway; conversely, one has to give oneself permission to get lost in a wilderness of inner states of being.

Wander long enough, descend deep enough, take enough wrong turns, resist intransigent power creatively enough, and when the night becomes dark enough above the tangled tree-line you will find your lodestar.

Nowadays, one must cultivate a high tolerance for being lost. Because, in a doomed culture, in order to have a chance at gaining an original sensibility, one must wander far beyond the royal court of flatterers, uninspired fools and scheming courtesans who are driven to spend their days truckling before a senile king nodding on his throne.

We find ourselves, currently, stranded in a crisis of selfhood, engendered by a system that demands that the untamable yearnings of the human heart be expressed almost exclusively within the limited lexicon of consumerism, that the path of self-expression be obstructed at the velvet rope-fortified domain of corporate state show biz types and elitist-approved artists, that the imagination is useless unless it generates vast monetary rewards for the one percent.

In short, because the known thoroughfares now dead-end into a wasteland.

"Only those who will risk going too far can possibly find out how far one can go. – T.S. Eliot

The vehemence of the imagination motivates. It rages against oppression, as it, in equal measure, both protects and frees one's heart. It creates and endures. The heart, the alpha and omega point of the imagination, rebels against sensible centrism as it serves to transform demons of conformity into recalcitrant angels who are the sworn enemies of mindless power.

Moreover, the implications of this predicament extend far beyond the essential struggle for individual selfhood, for this situation is interwoven with a larger

struggle for the survival of our species – a crisis that is rapidly reaching the ecological tipping point.

How we negotiate this perilous landscape will not depend on an ability to adapt to the prevailing madness of the present order. To the contrary, our chances of avoiding catastrophe will hinge on an ability to embrace novel understandings wrought by imaginative engagement with emergent realities.

This approach will also prove helpful in withstanding the inevitable conflicts that will arise with the defenders of the societal arrangements of the present whose reactionary tactics will grow ever more ruthless and brutal in direct proportion to their escalating level of panic, inevitably provoked by the collapsing certainties of the entrenched (but unsustainable) order with which they have aligned their fate.

Those are the types of fears that have kept us estranged from each other, atomized, alienated, mistrustful of the vitality of communal engagement, afraid of movement building waiting for instructions from the powerful on how to proceed through life, as opposed to going about the business of making the world anew.

“It takes a worried man to sing a worried song. I’m worried now but I won’t be worried long,” so go the lyrics of the traditional folk song.

By what means do people who have experienced a lifetime of economic hardship and official oppression endure and continue to sing out in defiance?

Because they have learned this: the forces of repression might buffet your body, might zip-cuff your wrists, might lock you in jail – but they cannot gain entrance into your mind, unless you allow them in. They cannot imprison your soul unless you let them.

“There is no week nor day nor hour when tyranny may not enter upon this country – if the people lose their confidence in themselves – and lose their roughness and spirit of defiance.” – Walt Whitman

Whitman’s admonition is known innately by some, by those whose spirit of defiance are helping us to remember our innate roughness: by Bradley Manning, by the people of Greece, of OWS, by those stopped and frisked, humiliated, harmed, and jailed on false charges daily on the streets of the U.S. police state, and by the spirit of defiance being displayed in ever increasing degree by oppress people the world over – by all of those souls who will no longer accept the dismal fate of being imprisoned by fear.

In truth, the one percent would not be capable of building a propaganda apparatus slick enough, nor be able to hire enough cops, nor assemble armies

with enough troops, nor build prisons rapidly enough nor large enough to keep us enslaved – if only enough of us awoke to the reality of our common plight.

Therefore: “I’m worried now but I won’t be worried long.”

Phil Rockstroh is a poet, lyricist and philosopher bard living in New York City.

He may be contacted at: phil@philrockstroh.com. Visit Phil’s website:

<http://philrockstroh.com/> or at FaceBook:

<http://www.facebook.com/#!/profile.php?id=100000711907499>

Santorum ‘Throws Up’ on JFK/Obama

Exclusive: Rick Santorum says he almost threw up reading John Kennedy’s 1960 speech on religious tolerance, and the GOP presidential hopeful sees sinister intent in President Obama’s plea that young Americans seek higher education. So, what would a Santorum America be like, asks Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

With Republican presidential front-runner Rick Santorum, it’s hard to decide what is more alarming, his know-nothingism or his dishonesty. In recent days, he has put on displays of both, decrying President Barack Obama’s advocacy for higher learning and distorting John F. Kennedy’s 1960 appeal for religious tolerance.

Like many on the Right, Santorum also selectively disregards the founding principles of the United States, which include government neutrality on religion. In one speech, Santorum said he “almost threw up” when reading Kennedy’s reiteration of that principle more than a half century ago when JFK was seeking to become the first Catholic president.

Instead of embracing Kennedy’s support for the separation of church and state, which has spared America much of the religious violence that has marred other parts of the world, Santorum espouses a chip-on-the-shoulder notion that by not embracing the Bible as a governing philosophy the government is picking on fundamentalist Christians.

Of course, we’ve seen a version of this religious “victimhood” before, when Fox News and other right-wing media outlets concocted the absurd notion of a “War on Christmas” despite the annual extravagance of a month-long celebration in honor of the mythological birth of the baby Jesus, ending in the nation’s only

official religious holiday.

The reality is that Americans of all religious views while out buying their groceries or riding in elevators have no choice but to listen to Christmas carols. They watch their cities decked out in red-and-green Christmas colors. To state the obvious, there is no comparable celebration for Yom Kippur or Ramadan.

But fundamentalist Christians still detect a “war” in the renaming of public-school “Christmas concerts” as “winter concerts” and similar concessions to the fact that America also is home to Jews, Muslims, atheists and people of other religious persuasions.

What Santorum is now doing on the campaign trail is retrofitting the “war on Christmas” into a more general “war on religion.” In recent speeches, he has accused President Obama of following a “phony theology,” i.e. “not a theology based on the Bible.”

Santorum’s argument plays on two levels first, raising fresh doubts that Obama is a real Christian (when many right-wing Christians still insist that he’s a Muslim) and second, maintaining that Obama’s promotion of environmentalism is somehow an assault on Christianity.

Santorum wants Americans to see legislation aimed at protecting the Earth and Nature as a violation of the Bible’s granting Man dominion over the planet, as if God bestowed on Man the right to plunder the Earth to the point of making it uninhabitable for future generations.

Some of Santorum’s reckless views on the environment fit with the fundamentalist Christian notion that the End Times are near and thus the Earth’s resources can be used without regard to the future. (Note to the campaign press: before Santorum becomes the U.S. president, you might want to ask about his views on the End Times.)

No College For You

Santorum is contemptuous, too, of Obama’s appeals to America’s youth to seek higher education so they can fill the high-tech jobs of the 21st Century. Obama has asked “every American to commit to at least one year or more of higher education or career training.”

But Santorum sees in that a dark conspiracy to indoctrinate American youth away from “faith” as well as an example of Obama’s elitism. Santorum told one campaign crowd, “President Obama once said he wants everybody in America to go to college. What a snob!”

In that advice from Obama about higher education, the former Pennsylvania senator detected a slight against “good, decent men and women who go out and work hard every day and put their skills to tests that aren’t taught by some liberal college professor.”

Santorum then advocated that Americans seek out other alternatives for upgrading their skills. “There’s technical schools, there’s additional training, vocational training,” he said, although that would seem to be no different than Obama’s frequent touting of community colleges that partner with companies on job training.

Except that when Obama makes these appeals like when he addresses students at the start of the school year and urges them to do their homework his agenda must be to brainwash the children into some atheistic dystopia where true believers are hunted down by black helicopters and delivered to reeducation camps.

The more Santorum speaks the more it appears that his world view has been shaped by right-wing Christian paranoia that can be found in some fundamentalist novels rather than in the real world.

The truth is that the Americans most discriminated against for their religious views are probably atheists, perhaps even more so than Muslims and Jews. Despite the constitutional mandate in Article VI that “no religious Test shall ever be required” for any public office, it’s hard to find an avowed atheist in any elected government post anywhere.

Hard Times at Penn State

However, in Santorum World, the Christians are the persecuted ones. In [an appearance](#) on ABC-TV’s “This Week” on Sunday, Santorum was still recalling his victimhood several decades ago while attending Penn State.

“I went through it at Penn State,” Santorum told host George Stephanopoulos. “You talk to most kids who go to college who are conservatives, and you are singled out, you are ridiculed, you are I can tell you personally, I know that, you know, we I went through a process where I was docked for my conservative views. This is sort of a regular routine.

“You know the statistic that at least I was familiar with from a few years ago – I don’t know if it still holds true but I suspect it may even be worse that 62 percent of kids who enter college with some sort of faith commitment leave without it. This is not a neutral setting.”

But, of course, it may actually be “a neutral setting.” It may just be that some of the myths taught by religious fundamentalists don’t withstand objective

scrutiny in an environment of factual learning and in different circumstances, most Americans would cheer that fact.

For instance, if Muslims trained in fundamentalist Islamist madrassas went to a cosmopolitan university and learned real history like, say, reading about the suffering of Jews in the Holocaust that presumably would be a good thing because it would increase tolerance and understanding.

Or, let's say that Christian children who believe in Santa Claus attend a public school and learn from other children that there is no Santa Claus. We might feel sad about that development, but it would not mean the public school was not "a neutral setting." The hard truth is there is no Santa Claus.

So, what would a President Santorum want? An American system of higher education that is the Christian equivalent of an Islamic fundamentalist madrassa, schools that indoctrinate American youth in the Faith and tell them to view Reason as the temptation of the Devil?

The Founders' Wisdom

The Christian world has seen this script before and it does not end well. Indeed, it is what motivated America's Founders to adopt the First Amendment's joint edict that "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof." The Founders were well aware of the dark side of official religions.

By enacting the First Amendment, James Madison and other constitutional framers were not prohibiting the involvement of religious people in the public square, but they were saying that the government must remain neutral on matters of religion.

That is what John F. Kennedy was recalling in his famous 1960 address pleading for religious tolerance toward Catholics, the speech that Santorum said made him almost vomit. On the campaign trail recently, Santorum noted that "earlier in my political career, I had the opportunity to read the speech, and I almost threw up. You should read the speech."

Asked by Stephanopoulos "why did it make you throw up," Santorum responded: "Because the first line, first substantive line in the speech says, 'I believe in America where the separation of church and state is absolute.' I don't believe in an America where the separation of church and state is absolute.

"The idea that the church can have no influence or no involvement in the operation of the state is absolutely antithetical to the objectives and vision of our country. Kennedy for the first time articulated the vision saying, 'no,

faith is not allowed in the public square. I will keep it separate.' Go on and read the speech.

"[Kennedy says] 'I will have nothing to do with faith. I won't consult with people of faith.' It was an absolutist doctrine that was abhorrent at the time of 1960. And I went down to Houston, Texas, 50 years almost to the day [after Kennedy's speech, which also was delivered in Houston], and gave a speech and talked about how important it is for everybody to feel welcome in the public square. "

Stephanopoulos: "You think you wanted to throw up?"

Santorum: "Well, yes, absolutely, to say that people of faith have no role in the public square? You bet that makes you throw up. What kind of country do we live in that says only people of non-faith can come into the public square and make their case?

"That makes me throw up and it should make every American who is seen from the President [Obama], someone who is now trying to tell people of faith that you will do what the government says, we are going to impose our values on you, not that you can't come to the public square and argue against it, but now we're going to turn around and say we're going to impose our values from the government on people of faith, which of course is the next logical step when people of faith, at least according to John Kennedy, have no role in the public square."

Not True

Of course, Kennedy said no such thing in 1960. His speech did not declare that "people of faith have no role in the public square." Kennedy himself was a practicing Catholic as is Santorum. Kennedy also collaborated with the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr., a person of faith who clearly operated in the public square. It's odd, too, that Santorum, while speaking as a person of faith in the public square, would say that a person of faith can't speak in the public square.

Indeed, there are countless examples of people of faith operating in America's public square, both as advocates and officeholders. Indeed, as mentioned earlier, probably the Americans most excluded from the public square are atheists and other non-believers who generally are punished by voters for not having a religious faith.

What Kennedy was seeking in his speech on Sept. 12, 1960, was an acceptance by voters of candidates based on their character and positions, not their religion. Facing accusations that he might take orders from the Vatican, Kennedy asserted

that he would strictly respect the founding American principle of separation of church and state.

In part, Kennedy said, "But because I am a Catholic, and no Catholic has ever been elected president, the real issues in this campaign have been obscured, perhaps deliberately, in some quarters less responsible than this. So it is apparently necessary for me to state once again not what kind of church I believe in, for that should be important only to me, but what kind of America I believe in.

"I believe in an America where the separation of church and state is absolute, where no Catholic prelate would tell the president (should he be Catholic) how to act, and no Protestant minister would tell his parishioners for whom to vote; where no church or church school is granted any public funds or political preference; and where no man is denied public office merely because his religion differs from the president who might appoint him or the people who might elect him.

"I believe in an America that is officially neither Catholic, Protestant nor Jewish; where no public official either requests or accepts instructions on public policy from the Pope, the National Council of Churches or any other ecclesiastical source; where no religious body seeks to impose its will directly or indirectly upon the general populace or the public acts of its officials; and where religious liberty is so indivisible that an act against one church is treated as an act against all.

"For while this year it may be a Catholic against whom the finger of suspicion is pointed, in other years it has been, and may someday be again, a Jew, or a Quaker or a Unitarian or a Baptist. It was Virginia's harassment of Baptist preachers, for example, that helped lead to Jefferson's statute of religious freedom. Today I may be the victim, but tomorrow it may be you, until the whole fabric of our harmonious society is ripped at a time of great national peril.

"Finally, I believe in an America where religious intolerance will someday end; where all men and all churches are treated as equal; where every man has the same right to attend or not attend the church of his choice; where there is no Catholic vote, no anti-Catholic vote, no bloc voting of any kind; and where Catholics, Protestants and Jews, at both the lay and pastoral level, will refrain from those attitudes of disdain and division which have so often marred their works in the past, and promote instead the American ideal of brotherhood.

"That is the kind of America in which I believe. And it represents the kind of presidency in which I believe, a great office that must neither be humbled by making it the instrument of any one religious group, nor tarnished by

arbitrarily withholding its occupancy from the members of any one religious group. I believe in a president whose religious views are his own private affair, neither imposed by him upon the nation, or imposed by the nation upon him as a condition to holding that office.

"I would not look with favor upon a president working to subvert the First Amendment's guarantees of religious liberty. Nor would our system of checks and balances permit him to do so. And neither do I look with favor upon those who would work to subvert Article VI of the Constitution by requiring a religious test, even by indirection, for it. If they disagree with that safeguard, they should be out openly working to repeal it.

"I want a chief executive whose public acts are responsible to all groups and obligated to none; who can attend any ceremony, service or dinner his office may appropriately require of him; and whose fulfillment of his presidential oath is not limited or conditioned by any religious oath, ritual or obligation.

"This is the kind of America I believe in, and this is the kind I fought for in the South Pacific, and the kind my brother died for in Europe. No one suggested then that we may have a 'divided loyalty,' that we did 'not believe in liberty,' or that we belonged to a disloyal group that threatened the 'freedoms for which our forefathers died.'

"And in fact ,this is the kind of America for which our forefathers died, when they fled here to escape religious test oaths that denied office to members of less favored churches; when they fought for the Constitution, the Bill of Rights and the Virginia Statute of Religious Freedom; and when they fought at the shrine I visited today, the Alamo. For side by side with Bowie and Crockett died McCafferty and Bailey and Carey. But no one knows whether they were Catholic or not, for there was no religious test at the Alamo.

"I ask you tonight to follow in that tradition, to judge me on the basis of my record of 14 years in Congress, on my declared stands against an ambassador to the Vatican, against unconstitutional aid to parochial schools, and against any boycott of the public schools (which I have attended myself), instead of judging me on the basis of these pamphlets and publications we all have seen that carefully select quotations out of context from the statements of Catholic church leaders, usually in other countries, frequently in other centuries, and always omitting, of course, the statement of the American Bishops in 1948, which strongly endorsed church-state separation, and which more nearly reflects the views of almost every American Catholic.

"I do not consider these other quotations binding upon my public acts. Why should you? But let me say, with respect to other countries, that I am wholly

opposed to the state being used by any religious group, Catholic or Protestant, to compel, prohibit, or persecute the free exercise of any other religion.

“And I hope that you and I condemn with equal fervor those nations which deny their presidency to Protestants, and those which deny it to Catholics. And rather than cite the misdeeds of those who differ, I would cite the record of the Catholic Church in such nations as Ireland and France, and the independence of such statesmen as Adenauer and De Gaulle.

“But let me stress again that these are my views. For contrary to common newspaper usage, I am not the Catholic candidate for president. I am the Democratic Party’s candidate for president, who happens also to be a Catholic. I do not speak for my church on public matters, and the church does not speak for me.

“Whatever issue may come before me as president, on birth control, divorce, censorship, gambling or any other subject, I will make my decision in accordance with these views, in accordance with what my conscience tells me to be the national interest, and without regard to outside religious pressures or dictates. And no power or threat of punishment could cause me to decide otherwise.

“But if the time should ever come, and I do not concede any conflict to be even remotely possible, when my office would require me to either violate my conscience or violate the national interest, then I would resign the office; and I hope any conscientious public servant would do the same.

“But I do not intend to apologize for these views to my critics of either Catholic or Protestant faith, nor do I intend to disavow either my views or my church in order to win this election.

“If I should lose on the real issues, I shall return to my seat in the Senate, satisfied that I had tried my best and was fairly judged. But if this election is decided on the basis that 40 million Americans lost their chance of being president on the day they were baptized, then it is the whole nation that will be the loser, in the eyes of Catholics and non-Catholics around the world, in the eyes of history, and in the eyes of our own people.

“But if, on the other hand, I should win the election, then I shall devote every effort of mind and spirit to fulfilling the oath of the presidency, practically identical, I might add, to the oath I have taken for 14 years in the Congress. For without reservation, I can ‘solemnly swear that I will faithfully execute the office of president of the United States, and will to the best of my ability preserve, protect, and defend the Constitution, so help me God.’”

So what does it say about one of the Republican presidential frontrunners that Kennedy's speech from 1960 would make him almost throw up?

[For more on related topics, see Robert Parry's *Lost History, Secrecy & Privilege and Neck Deep*, now available in a three-book set for the discount price of only \$29. For details, [click here](#).]

Robert Parry broke many of the Iran-Contra stories in the 1980s for the Associated Press and Newsweek. His latest book, *Neck Deep: The Disastrous Presidency of George W. Bush*, was written with two of his sons, Sam and Nat, and can be ordered at [neckdeepbook.com](#). His two previous books, *Secrecy & Privilege: The Rise of the Bush Dynasty from Watergate to Iraq* and *Lost History: Contras, Cocaine, the Press & 'Project Truth'* are also available there.

CNN Silences War-Skeptical Soldier

Exclusive: By obsessing over Iran gaining a nuclear weapon "capability" even with no actual bomb while ignoring Israel's undeclared nuclear arsenal, the U.S. news media proves the point of its own bias. There's also the usual hostility toward dissenting voices, as ex-CIA analyst Ray McGovern notes.

By Ray McGovern

When CNN interviews a U.S. Army corporal preparing for his third deployment to Afghanistan, should TV viewers be permitted to hear him out on a front-burner issue like Iran's alleged threat to Israel? For those who might think so, watch what happens when 28-year-old Cpl. Jesse Thorsen touches a neuralgic nerve by suggesting that Israel can take care of itself.

It's impossible to say exactly what happened to the remote feed that suddenly got lost in transmission back to CNN Central, but the minute-long video is truly worth a thousand words:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A7yTCPDgDgo&NR=1&feature=endscreen>

The interview, which dates back to Jan. 3 when the Iowa caucuses were the evening's big news, is at least symbolic of how our Fawning Corporate Media treats dissident voices that clash with the prevailing pro-war-on-Iran bias. I missed the segment when it aired, but I think it still merits comment today as war clouds thicken, again.

In the aborted one-minute segment, Cpl. Thorsen is interviewed by CNN's Dana

Bash, who presumably picked him out for the live interview because he had a large tattoo on his neck about never forgetting 9/11. The tattoo plus two tours in Afghanistan behind him (and yet another in front of him) may have suggested to Bash and her CNN producers that Thorsen was unlikely to say anything to muddle or muffle the new drumbeat for war.

Based on Thorsen's military appearance alone, the typical CNN viewer could almost settle back in an easy chair and anticipate some stirring patriotic bathos about America standing tall and the interview ending with the obligatory "thank you for your service," which any right-thinking journalist utters to show that he or she is part of Team America.

But Bash got more than she bargained for when Thorsen turned out to be a well-informed and articulate young man who began endorsing Ron Paul's non-interventionist views on U.S. foreign policy, i.e. that the United States should go to war only when absolutely necessary to defend its vital national interests and shouldn't be picking a fight with Iran on behalf of Israel.

Such comments, of course, are almost literally heretical at places like CNN, which accepts unquestioningly the idea of "American exceptionalism" and abides by the neoconservative dogma that U.S. and Israeli security interests are one and the same.

That's why CNN and the rest of the FCM typically dismiss Ron Paul's views on foreign policy as dangerously "isolationist," if not laughably loony. "Can you believe it? He doesn't want to station American troops all around the world! He doesn't believe in preemptive wars to disarm our enemies of weapons that they may not have now but might someday in the future have the capability of building! Ha! Ha! What a nut!"

The FCM's dismissal of Paul's foreign-policy views was a key reason why comedian Jon Stewart once compared Paul to "the 13th floor" of a hotel, the level that often doesn't exist because customers consider the number unlucky. So, when the FCM would lavish attention on other Republican candidates, who finished both above and below Paul in some poll or in early balloting, the pundits would pass over Paul as if he didn't exist.

Going 'Off-Script'

So, what happened when Cpl. Thorsen veered "off script" so to speak and began reprising Ron Paulish views on the appropriate use of soldiers like himself? Well, CNN suddenly lost the feed. As Thorsen disappeared from the screen, CNN anchor Wolf Blitzer explained, "Sorry, we just lost our tech connection, unfortunately."

It's true that connections can be lost for any number of reasons and I can't say for sure that some alert CNN producer hit the "kill" switch as one might if Cpl. Thorsen had begun cursing uncontrollably but Blitzer and other CNN honchos didn't seem very eager to resume the interview, just as they generally don't book anti-war activists who disagree with the imperial orthodoxy.

You might remember, for instance, how CNN, like the other networks, stocked its pre-Iraq War "debates" with hawkish retired generals and admirals who would face only the mildest and most respectful questioning from Blitzer or some other anchor. In the rare moment when some war skeptic got on the air, he or she was treated with disdain, if not outright hostility, all the better for the network to demonstrate its "patriotism."

Some cable networks devoted more time to American restaurants that were renaming French fries into "Freedom fries" than to the millions of people who took to the streets to protest the looming invasion of Iraq. After all, what could those "activists" know about Iraq hiding all those stockpiles of WMDs?

But why mention the case of Cpl. Thorsen now? Because this one-minute video-that-is-better-than-a-thousand-words could come in handy as at least a symbolic reminder of the bias at CNN and other parts of the FCM when it comes to allowing a full and fair discussion about going to war against some "designated enemy."

This reality is bound to assume increased importance next week when Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu touches down in Washington to press his case for a preemptive war against Iran's nuclear program which has yet to produce a single nuclear bomb (and Iranian leaders say they don't intend to build one) while Israel has an undeclared nuclear arsenal of an estimated 200 to 300 bombs.

Just for fun, keep track of how many times Netanyahu and other war advocates get to weigh in on the unacceptable danger of an Iranian nuclear weapon "capability" compared to how many times they are asked why Israel has not signed the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty and why it won't let inspectors from the International Atomic Energy Agency into Israeli secret bases to examine Israel's actual nuclear weapons.

The FCM's latest drumming for war is likely to reach a crescendo during the first days of March, with Netanyahu crashing the cymbals loudly and the propaganda orchestra swelling in a martial symphony designed to stir the American people into another standing ovation for another preemptive war.

Ray McGovern works for Tell the Word, a publishing arm of the ecumenical Church of the Savior in inner-city Washington. He spent a total of 30 years as an Army Infantry/Intelligence officer and CIA analyst, and is co-founder of Veteran

The Roots of US Religious Tolerance

From the Archive: Ex-Sen. Rick Santorum's accusation that President Obama follows a "phony theology," one not "based on the Bible," revives the right-wing notion that the United States must be a "Christian nation" and that "separation of church and state" is a "myth," a topic that Baptist Minister Howard Bess addressed in 2011.

By the Rev. Howard Bess (Originally published Jan. 21, 2011)

Most people do not realize the meaning of being a Baptist. Theologically, we cover the full spectrum from right to left. We are scattered politically throughout Republicans, Democrats, Tea Partiers and None of the Above. Our hallmark is freedom.

Differing opinions are our strength, and we feel free to speak what other religious folk might call heresy. We are suspicious of all hierarchies, and when we feel our freedom is being challenged, we are quick to start another church. Baptist of course. There are far more varieties of Baptists than all the products that will ever be produced by Heinz.

Though we now cover the world, Baptists are a uniquely American phenomenon, dating back to early colonial days when Roger Williams was driven out of Massachusetts by the Congregationalists. (Ironically, these Massachusetts Puritans had fled England to avoid persecution for their religious beliefs, only to land in America and begin persecuting others for their religious beliefs.)

In 1636, Williams founded Providence Plantation, the first American colony truly dedicated to the free practice of religion (though even in Rhode Island, Jews and Catholics were looked upon with suspicion).

Though Williams started the first Baptist church in America in Providence, I believe Baptists made their finest contribution to American life in Virginia in the years after the Revolution. The new United States, with 13 member states, did not know what to do with religion in America. Though Thomas Jefferson was the country's most prominent advocate of freedom of religion, another important figure was his neighbor, James Madison.

Neither Jefferson nor Madison liked what was going on in Virginia. At the time,

Baptist preachers and other dissenters were required to get a government issued license to preach. Naturally the Baptist preachers kept on preaching without benefit of a license leading to whippings, fines and jail time. Still, they continued to preach.â€” â€”One firebrand preacher named John Leland became friends with Madison and convinced him that there should be no state church, that a complete separation between church and state was the only answer.

This wall of separation was born in Virginia and a Baptist was the prime mover. Subsequently, this principle was embedded in the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution with the mandate that “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof.”

Since then, Baptists have remained in the forefront of the struggle to keep government out of religion. Our watchdog agency is the Baptist Joint Committee, a powerful Washington, D.C., lobby that regularly presents briefs before the U.S. Supreme Court. BJC, now 75 years old, keeps Baptists across the country informed about the constant stream of religious freedom cases that come before the High Court.

In 2011, two church/state issues were making news, though under-reported in the daily newspapers. The first was President Barack Obama’s announcement of new clarifying policies for government partnerships with faith-based organizations. For many years faith-based organizations have provided services that are funded by federal grants. However, under President George W. Bush, the funding of faith-based organizations was greatly expanded.

Without congressional approval or oversight, President Bush by executive order established a whole new federal agency, called the White House Office of Faith-based and Neighborhood Partnerships. Under it, President Bush was able to funnel hundreds of millions of dollars to faith-based organizations.

On one level, the idea is not a bad one. Many faith-based agencies do wonderful work with people with special needs. Many times they have been shown to do tasks better and more effectively than government agencies. However, under the Bush program, violations of church-and-state separation were numerous. Large block grants were made to religious organizations with little oversight.

After taking office, President Obama endorsed the program but promised new regulations and better oversight. He issued the new policies, forbidding organizations to engage in explicitly religious activities. Government-funded programs must not include religious content. Many observers had hoped Obama would go further and require religious organizations to form separate not-for-profit entities. He chose not to take that step, while promising to closely monitor the programs and to require transparency in their operations.

The other looming issue is how the United States will treat the expanding religious diversity in America. Will government treat all religions evenhandedly or will some face discrimination? House Speaker John Boehner and Rep. Peter King, chairman of the House Homeland Security Committee, called for investigation of “radical” Muslims. Dare the Federal government investigate those of a particular religious persuasion?

J. Brent Walker, Executive Director of BJC, commented: “Ours is not a Christian nation, as some contend, but made up of many faiths, including now 17 percent who embrace no faith at all. Our plush pluralism is something to be celebrated, not something to be feared. And our biggest challenge today may be how we view Islam and treat our Muslim friends.”

I am pleased to be a part of a tradition that celebrates religious freedom. Diversity is good for us all.

The Rev. Howard Bess is a retired American Baptist minister, who lives in Palmer, Alaska. His e-mail address is hdbss@mtaonline.net.

Taking a Bite Out of Apple

The late Steve Jobs was perhaps the most acclaimed businessman of his generation, making the iconic Apple products both stylish and efficient, even if that meant pushing his work force to extremes. But those extremes sometimes meant cruelly exploiting overseas workers, as Michael Winship reports.

By Michael Winship

If you would seek proof of that famous Margaret Mead adage, “Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it’s the only thing that ever has,” look at what’s happening as more and more people protest Apple Inc.’s labor practices in China.

Take it one step further: if you should ever doubt the impact a solitary artist can have against injustice, meet Mike Daisey.

Daisey is a monologist, a creator of one-man shows, whose performance piece “The Agony and the Ecstasy of Steve Jobs” has jolted audiences into action as he parallels the obsessions of Jobs, the recently deceased former CEO of Apple; our consumer-driven lust for iPods, iPhones, and iPads and the human toll taken by their manufacture.

Apple like virtually every other electronics manufacturer subcontracts much of the work that goes into building its devices to companies in Asia. One of them, Foxconn Technology, is the largest private employer in China. Its factories there and in other parts of the world put together approximately 40 percent of all the consumer electronics devices on the planet. Their largest facility, Foxconn City, is in Shenzhen, just across the border from Hong Kong, and employs nearly a quarter of a million workers.

As *The New York Times* reported late last month, "Employees work excessive overtime, in some cases seven days a week, and live in crowded dorms. Some say they stand so long that their legs swell until they can hardly walk. Under-age workers have helped build Apple's products, and the company's suppliers have improperly disposed of hazardous waste and falsified records, according to company reports and advocacy groups that, within China, are often considered reliable, independent monitors.

"More troubling, the groups say, is some suppliers' disregard for workers' health. Two years ago, 137 workers at an Apple supplier in eastern China were injured after they were ordered to use a poisonous chemical to clean iPhone screens. Within seven months last year, two explosions at iPad factories, including in Chengdu [the capital of Sichuan province in southwest China], killed four people and injured 77. Before those blasts, Apple had been alerted to hazardous conditions inside the Chengdu plant, according to a Chinese group that published that warning."

The explosions were due to accumulations of aluminum dust from the polishing of thousands upon thousands of iPad cases. There have been more than a dozen suicides as well part of Foxconn's solution was to install nets around buildings to catch jumpers and accounts of workers fired after their hands were made useless by repetitive stress injuries.

Many have reported on the working conditions at Foxconn, but it's Mike Daisey's one-man play, media coverage of his work and the broadcast of a one-hour version on the public radio series *This American Life* that seem to have galvanized public opinion.

Physically large and in charge, Mike Daisey's performance style suggests a peculiar combination of the late Spalding Gray and Lewis Black of "The Daily Show with Jon Stewart." He sits at a table on a bare stage with some notes and a glass of water and simply tells his story; at times hysterically funny, at others, poignant, withering and accusatory. Some might find his manner a bit loud and overbearing: the night we were there last fall, media moguls Barry Diller and David Geffen were sitting a couple of rows in front of us and walked out after the first fifteen minutes or so. (Don't try to deny it: we have your

ticket stubs.)

But maybe it wasn't Daisey's profanity and mild bellicosity that got under their skin and instead, some simple truths. Daisey begins by detailing his own passion for all things Apple ("I am an Apple fanboy, I am a worshipper in the cult of Mac") and slowly segues into stories from the company's history and its increasing dependence on Chinese labor. Daisey traveled to China to see it all firsthand.

"You know," he says, "when we dream of a future when the regulations are washed away and the corporations are finally free to sail above us, you don't have to dream about some sci-fi-dystopian-*Blade Runner-1984* bull____. You can go to Shenzhen tomorrow they're making your s____ that way today."

All the bad publicity and petitions that sprang up, especially after Daisey's public radio appearance apparently have gotten to super-secretive Apple, which at an estimated worth of more than \$465 billion has now surpassed ExxonMobil as the largest publicly traded company in the world. They've launched a PR counteroffensive that included this week's "exclusive" visit to Foxconn City by Bill Weir of ABC's "Nightline," who reported on the suicides and other health issues but said, "China has very different values when it comes to gainful employment" and compared some of the complaints to what "you'd hear at any factory or college campus."

Weir breathlessly referred to Apple products as "precious objects" and "works of art" and said that although Bob Iger, the CEO of the Walt Disney Company, ABC's owner, sits on Apple's board and the Steve Jobs Trust is Disney's largest individual stockholder, "I only agreed to report exactly what I saw."

In its latest, annual Supplier Responsibility Progress Report, Apple for the first time released a list of its subcontractors and announced that it has joined the Fair Labor Association, which makes unannounced factory inspections to check on working conditions and report violations. And last Saturday, Foxconn announced it's raising salaries by as much as 25 percent (to \$400 a month) and reducing excessive overtime.

But not so fast. According to the activist, Hong Kong-based Students and Scholars against Corporate Misbehavior, "The new basic wage only applies to the workers in Shenzhen. In inland provinces, where two-thirds of production workers are based, basic salary remains meager. Given that inflation in China is high. Foxconn is just following the trend of wage increases in the electronics industry in China."

As for the Fair Labor Association, it's not all that independent. Writing on the

CNN website, Scott Nova, executive director of the Worker Rights Consortium notes, "Most of its money – millions of dollars per year – comes from the very companies whose labor practices it is supposed to scrutinize. Although Apple has not disclosed its financial relationship with the Fair Labor Association, it is likely now the organization's largest funder.

"Moreover, on the association's board of directors sit executives of major corporations such as Nike, Adidas and agribusiness giant Syngenta. The job of these executives is to represent the interests of other member companies, such as Apple. Under the Fair Labor Association's rules, the company representatives on the board exercise veto power over major decisions."

Jeff Ballinger, director of Press for Change, a labor rights group, told *The New York Times*, "The Fair Labor Association is largely a fig leaf. There's all this rhetoric from corporate social responsibility people and the big companies that they want to improve labor standards, but all the pressure seems to be going the other direction – they're trying to force prices down."

Yes, Foxconn employees make well above the average salary of Chinese workers and yes, there are cultural issues and the overwhelming tide of globalization. But Apple is sitting on cash reserves of nearly \$100 billion. As others have noted, just one-tenth of one percent of that could go a long way toward improving conditions for its workers in China. They could even set up a health care plan.

And as an anonymous former Apple executive said, "Suppliers would change everything tomorrow if Apple told them they didn't have another choice."

Meanwhile, Mike Daisey keeps performing "The Agony and the Ecstasy of Steve Jobs" around the country. He finishes another New York run at the Public Theater on March 18, but you can listen to the *This American Life* radio version and at his website, MikeDaisey.com, you now can download the entire script.

Daisey says, "If Apple would spend less energy finessing its public image, and instead apply its efforts to real transparency and accountability, it could be a true leader for the electronics industry. Apple today is still saying what it said yesterday: trust us, we know best, there's nothing to worry about. They have not earned the trust they are asking for."

There's much protesters can do: petitions, letters, phone calls, boycotts. And Daisey has written that, "Talking about it, thinking about it when making purchasing decisions, and understanding it is not just symbolic. In a world of silence, speaking itself is action. It can be the first seeds of actual change. Do not be afraid to plant them."

In other words, Mike Daisey proclaims, "Spread the virus."

Michael Winship, senior writing fellow at Demos, is senior writer of the weekly public television series "Moyers & Company."

A Dangerous Resolution

Neoconservative Joe Lieberman is leading a group of nearly one-third of the U.S. Senate in demanding that President Obama stop Iran from achieving even a nuclear weapon "capability." But ex-CIA analyst Paul R. Pillar says such loose rhetoric can put the country on a dangerous course toward war.

By Paul R. Pillar

Delineating the nation's interests starts with the basics: the security and well-being of our citizens in our own homeland. Life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness, those sorts of things. There is no controversy about this, and the nation would and should spare no costs or risks to uphold these core interests.

National interests go far beyond the core to include as well many other things overseas. But few of those other things are so vital that they would be worth incurring every conceivable cost or risk to bring them about. Some things that are not in U.S. interests the United States may need to live with, because there is no way to avoid them short of measures that would damage U.S. interests even more.

Congress, as representative of the American people, has a proper and important role in declaring what is or is not in the interests of the United States. But if such declarations are not to be a useless and potentially endless laundry list of nice-to-haves, members of Congress need to do a couple of other things.

They need to explain *why* something is in U.S. interests, preferably by relating it to the core life-and-liberty stuff. And they need to stipulate to what lengths, and at what costs and risks, the United States should go to pursue the objective in question.

A [sense-of-the-Senate resolution on Iran](#) that Sens. Lindsey Graham, R-South Carolina, and Joe Lieberman, I-Connecticut, along with numerous cosponsors, introduced last week does neither of those things. The key operative language in the resolution "affirms that it is a vital national interest of the United States to prevent the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran from acquiring

a nuclear weapons capability” and “rejects any United States policy that would rely on efforts to contain a nuclear weapons-capable Iran,” further calling on the president to “oppose any policy that would rely on containment as an option in response to the Iranian nuclear threat.”

The resolution’s preambulatory language, with 19 “whereas” clauses, runs through a familiar litany of things people don’t like about Iran, from the Iranian president’s anti-Israeli rhetoric to weird alleged plots to assassinate ambassadors in Washington. But nothing in the resolution identifies how or why containment of a nuclear-weapons-capable Iran would be different from the status quo in any way that would damage a “vital national interest” of the United States.

It would be easy to imagine a similar resolution about the Soviet Union when it was about to get its first nuclear weapon in the late 1940s. There certainly would be plenty of good material for the preambulatory clauses. “Whereas the USSR is ruled by a bloodthirsty dictator who has killed millions and enslaved many more, has used force to subjugate half of Europe,” etc. the Senate “opposes any policy that would rely on containment as an option in response to the Soviet nuclear threat.” George Kennan, rest in peace.

The new resolution, despite ostensibly aiming for an agreement with Iran, would damage the prospects for negotiating any such agreement. The resolution calls for terms that are understandably nonstarters for Iran.

In referring to “the full and sustained suspension of all uranium enrichment-related and reprocessing activities,” the resolution appears to rule out an Iranian enrichment program under international supervision and inspection, which almost certainly would have to be part of any formula that could gain the agreement of both Iran and the Western powers.

Incredibly, the resolution also calls for “the verified end of Iran’s ballistic missile programs.” This goes beyond any United Nations resolutions on Iran, which talk about nuclear capability of missiles, and even beyond anything ever demanded of Saddam Hussein’s Iraq, for which range limits were imposed. It would be understandable if Tehran reads such language as further evidence that the United States is interested not in any negotiated agreement but instead only in regime change.

By declaring “nuclear weapons capability” rather than acquisition of a nuclear weapon to be unacceptable, the resolution also blurs red lines in a way that may flash green lights to Israel to launch a military attack on Iran.

This resolution also walks the United States farther down a path to launching

its own war against Iran. This stems partly from the resolution's very silence on how far the United States should go to try to prevent an Iranian nuclear weapon, implying that anything goes. It also stems from the usual way in which declarations of national interests or objectives are subsequently exploited.

Such declarations are habitually invoked by those pushing for action, obliterating any distinction between core, defend-at-all-costs interests and other objectives. The exploiters say, "If we agree that this is in our national interest, then why aren't we doing whatever it takes to attain it?"

Paul R. Pillar, in his 28 years at the Central Intelligence Agency, rose to be one of the agency's top analysts. He is now a visiting professor at Georgetown University for security studies. (This article first appeared as blog post at The National Interest's Web site. Reprinted with author's permission.)
