

## Miscellanies from the Disturbed Universe

The perfect liberal, democratic citizen who believed himself free would be a mix of the secular, profane world and the spiritual, sacred world or worlds. These would not clash so much as resolve and conciliate.

"Secularism" has nothing to do with "meaning." It has to do with "success." It is a technique that brackets out everything but the raw object and then applies other techniques to find out about that object and how it relates to other objects etc. The results are then given freely to the society which does what it wants with them. A person who has a problem can use these to try and solve the specific problem.

It's true that out of this comes a meaningless lifestyle of sorts or can. Just as the full immersion in the sacred can lead to fanaticism

If you remove the sacred from the universe you are left with objects. The language to discover what these objects are come from mathematics and physics, chemistry and so on. It should never be forgotten that it is a bracketing technique to simply discover "what's there." It uses methods of objectifying and is not a religion.

Even though science can pull a star apart and describe it quite well nothing it does has meaning except as the evidence it finds allows for something to happen here on Earth. Or, for the purist, knowledge is its own justification. This pulling apart and descriptions of nature under this powerful but finite technique has produced an overwhelming world; too overwhelming in some cases, too successful in many cases. It is the prime fact-finder.

The sacred has its pathologies without question because it is a compound of "what we are," as we experience ourselves to be. We apply the profane to ourselves at the risk of making ourselves absurd, meaningless and so objects for a kind of slow annihilation. The sacred is the relation we have to God, death, nature, all the human emotions, eternity, "what we are here," and so on. It can only solve the problem of morale within the self.

The happy person is he or she who knows these two realms intimately and has nurtured them with aplomb.

The world will continue to be built through secular technique but the individual needs the ballast of the sacred otherwise he becomes a shadow of the secular, a violent defender of it, or a poor sap caught in its powerful trap knowing he is only trying to get some satisfying morsel out of it and deciding that life is "but a joke." A short joke that passes in a moment.

We would rather live in a world where the mind is free to address all phenomena, including the origin of the universe with openness and whatever technique can do the job. Whatever challenges it throws down at belief or "our place," is worth taking on. It could very well be that science and its mathematics is only one of many steps to finding the core of knowledge of what the universe is or what potentials we can salvage from it.

The spiritual teaches courage at the basic level. It teaches the spirit to push back the envelope to creativity because there is nothing really to lose. It too employs techniques and its facts result in human behavior. And just as science has created a very destructive world, religions have destroyed and continue to do so. Which tells me that Power is at the center of the universe.

The density we must travel today! It has a finite point and gives us a hearty laugh when we are through.

The creative says this, "we are at the beginning of something yet we know all that has gone before. It is never a contest, an either/or. It is a simple act of intelligence."

December 8, 2010

If you try and sincerely understand the world all-at-once you'll end up nuts or under the protection of some nut-group. Understand as much as you can, make it substantial but let it mature and then let a window open, with a filter on it, to bring in new information and perception that increases the substantial and/or enriches. You bring understanding up to a nice round limit, admit it, be humbled by it and allow for new things to filter in.

The abstract view of the world always plays into the wrong hands. Keep to the experienced view. Let experience test out the abstract idea.

If I know geopolitics and have the ability to move a ship from one ocean to another then the form of knowledge is set and I must act on that knowledge. But if I know geopolitics, as I have learned it from professionals and experts and crackpots of every stripe, and have no ability to move an ant let alone a

ship with a mere word from me then my imagination owns that knowledge and transforms it in the direction of my strongest suit.

The material world is never as playful as the ideal world.

The American is privileged in that all dualities are part of him and he can develop them all if he's patient and not ground down by the zero-sum material world. Politics divides, money divides, religion can divide, ideas divide. But a person who took on the dualities would not be divided since he would know that the other polarity was as much in the person carrying it as in the person not carrying it. Perhaps that is what freedom truly is. The material world shows us the fault lines but then our incredible freedom allows us to take on all the dualities and resolve them, at least to our satisfaction, so that we are released from the burdens of the conflicted world.

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When the comedians rule then the serious and profound are always going to be seen as toxic. The serious is always going to seem on the side of power, supporting it and so on. The comedians rule when the people no longer believe in anything or are willing to learn anything. When the dust settles the comedians have simply prepared the way for their agonal doppelgangers, the "serious" entertainers like Reagan and Clinton.

But then the entertainers are the gods these days aren't they? With such a vast kingdom of gods the people feel secure because they get to choose the ones to follow.

The "culture wars" are often an entertaining Punch and Judy show between scary clowns.

I would vote the comedians over the generals, even the priests, if it came to a vote. After all, the comedians just want the people to laugh. And there is a time for laughter. Does the laughter come after great change or to precipitate it?

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America will lead for a long time. Something is occurring that is of moment. The escaped slaves and historically colonized peoples will rule for a while. America was the first and, no doubt, will be the last. It will be a time of fulfillment.

Wealth will be seen, for a time, as suspect and a disease that needs to be cured of itself.

Aristotle could not fix and probably not understand the political environment today. He would design as rational a politics one could imagine. He would require a full-bodied understanding of all the systems and functions of government. He would raise the level of mind to the level of power. But it would be irrelevant because he would only persuade a small percentage of citizens. The rest would be the wild apes and laughing hyenas they appear to be.

Aristotle would not quit his efforts but he would know, in his gut, that the people cannot sustain a healthy republic and will lose it, blaming everything and everyone but themselves.

October 30, 2010

Diddling Before the Screen

In a democracy the people always get what they deserve. If they don't it's too late anyway.

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Politics usually imitates dementia in that you cannot confront it directly where it has the advantage of madness to chase away every reasonable argument. Rather, you need to understand that it is demented and then assuage it from its madness to your more rational point of view.

There is something mystical about American Simpletons. Their nuttiness is a very stubborn thing.

"I'll defend their right to be simpletons with the last breath I take!"

Statesmen don't rise to the surface in a culture of guinea pigs.

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You can always tell the times you live in by whether politics has made the people better or has destroyed them. From here it looks like the latter.

The politics has destroyed the people because they've been turned inside out by the fast pace of life, its complexity, and their stubborn ignorance that refuses to look at facts. "Kill all the fact-finders!"

The rational cannot fight madness. It has to be hard until madness transforms itself. And, of course, in a polity such as this that is impossible.

Democracy must always challenge itself; the people have to challenge themselves. That is the first rung of self-rule. Without it democracy is a fraud. It is a machinery of dead parts marking time until it collapses in a heap.

The most depressing, demoralizing thing I have witnessed thus far is the celebration of and belief in one's ignorance. The pride of ignorance. Rather than the courage of openness, tolerance, and facts.

At this late stage of the democracy "leadership," therefore, "power" belongs to those who can manage "pluralities," because they have an intrinsic knowledge of the way the culture has developed over time and a clear understanding that one self-interest implies all the other interests. The war of one "self-interest" against the other self-interests exhausts itself pretty quickly. Therefore those who are scurrying around because they feel the blowtorch on their ass are neither "leaders" nor should gain any power.

An intelligent manager of democracy will encourage "politics as a war," because he will then be able to deftly create alliances among the warring parties.

"Cultural war," "political war," whatever one names it is a marshmallow fight between angry people who are unhappy in the context of a life unprecedented in the history of the world. Any person who truly believes in the vibrant future of democracy says, "bring it on."

September 17, 2010

## The Simple Task of Being a Citizen

When people drive on the freeway most are contented with the pleasure of the drive and, even, historic memory that men and women have come a long way. With an old mountain in the foreground it is even starker, especially when history has climbed the mountain and those who explored it could hardly have guessed the machines that would rove to and from the mountain in a few centuries. That is most of the people driving the freeway. They are the consumers and voters for the most part, the mainstream, the good people.

A writer looks at the freeway and he sees people wanting to get somewhere as quickly as possible. And he removes the cars. And says (to himself of course) “now how do the people get somewhere as quickly as possible?”

And even the good people have to admit that for all the freedom of the car it has stuck them in a peculiar spot, pinned them in where they cannot escape. Not only that but they are ignorant of the consequences of the car and driving it through the kind brown valleys. The wars, the cost, the warming gasses, the killings, the Gulf of Mexico and more.

We live in these polarities and why not?

A dynamic civilization happily lives in those polarities.

It cannot be perfect but if the consequences are huge how can we call ourselves free citizens and pretend we are ignorant of the costs? When we do that we have undermined our ability to be the freest of the free. Our visions are as twisted and dark as those in tyrannies.

The polarities exist to stimulate inventive imagination and creativity.

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The Dreadful Future

The writer always looks at the worst case scenario. He can't stand complacency. He takes values and "ideals" seriously. He views America not as the empire but as the newly discovered colony. If liberal democracy fails in America, much in America would remain the same but America as an idea would cease. And so the two things one looks at are the quality of the people at any given time and the corruption of the system of governance. "Politics" is an afterthought; it is the fashionable manipulations of the people at any given time.

We look at it now, at this point, because America is at the weakest it's been for many decades. It went from the strongest to the most vulnerable very quickly. The might that could defeat Nazi's, Japanese militarists, and even communists can't subdue rag-tags in Afghanistan and Iraq. The vaunted economy was a massive pyramid scheme. This signals to the pessimist in me a very foreboding cycle as new tyrants and wannabe Napoleons and Hitler's begin to emerge. It means that once again the future will be determined by a huge conflagration in the 21st century and the winner will begin a new epoch in human history. And there is no predicting who that winner will be.

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#### Little Seeds

Any effective grass roots reform movement, to sweep through the manure filled stables of the Beltway, has to cross over a lot of pluralities. The Tea Party has no credibility because it is very transparent they are angry because a black man is President. And the left is an aging silliness that has the same slogans, same people, same old paper Mache masks.

President Obama needs to find his leadership mojo before it's too late. He needs to inspire a critical mass of people to insert themselves between himself and the Beltway. As it stands Obama is walking the plank because of the fear he is a one-trick pony. He is sincere, bright, hard-working, and trustworthy but he lacks a certain personable nature that connects him to the people ala Clinton and Reagan. And it was the people who saved those two presidents.

A person on his or her way to power is an angel. But that same person holding on to power is a devil.

June 5, 2010

#### Rants and Raves

Oh politics, you tired charade of half-truths. You want your half-truth to be my full-truth? You believe I'm an idiot and have not experienced the country and world as vaster than your half-truths? I have experienced self and world in ways that make your half-truths seem like the spittle of madmen. In fact, if

there is any challenge to “citizenship” it is expressly this: Take all the half-truths and put the pieces together to make a full truth. No, that would make things too perfect and simple. Too much money and jobs are at stake.

The people fell for the greatest con there is: Money will buy you happiness and security. Pleasure is the goal in life.

When that house of cards falls look out and, obviously, it has fallen to a degree. So, where are you going to find the sacrificing people, those who have deferral of gratification? They will be the builders of your future. New industries are not built by those who want instant wealth.

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Progressive politics does not come out of old, fossilized ideas and achievements but out of a sense of utopia. A utopia extracted from the raw bad and ugliness of the present time and projected into the future “given that this dynamic and that one will be changed.” I don’t see that in the present left. Just as I see on the right a schism between wealth and populism.

Articulate the utopia, back engineer it to the present, circle the points of conflict and develop something. The progressives stopped around 1978 or so.

Liberals come out of the sober assessment of “where we are” in relation to the utopia and what can be won now. That movement is only appreciated after the fact when you can look back a decade or two.

As with religion, there is no fully realized utopia until the after-death and the adventure is filled with danger.

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Capitalism has the same moral problem as socialism. To get to its promised land it has to violate a lot of human decency. And with the loss of human decency comes the loss of moral credibility and so the resorting to violence and brainwashing to keep the idea alive.



I always think of the computer as an object of utopia. It was going to fully empower the citizen and provide some equalizer to the powers that owned mainframes. It did not create a utopia and, in fact, is used by anti-utopian types as well as more idealistic types. It became a utility that marketing genius had to invest with magical powers like the car.

At some point the gains in the progressive ends of things are evaluated and tested by the mainstream and the conserving aspect of the society take those gains over.

Such as I understand things at any rate.

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Self-rule requires a leader when a crisis occurs and the people don't trust themselves. When they know there is power but they feel none of it themselves, then the leader must connect them with the power and stand up straight and lead.

At the moment of connection he can compromise and weave deftly through complexity and clashing ambitions to empty the nation on the other side of its own fears.

A people strengthened by this connection know what to do. And when they know what to do they become democratic citizens and lift things out of crisis.

August 16, 2011

Division

America, from the beginning, divided into two parts defined by the conflict between the "republicans" and "federalists" soon after the ratification of the Constitution. On the one hand there was the model of the pure Roman state, favored by Hamilton, where power concentrated for the benefit of the security and stability of the whole. And on the other the new model of the free people in all their guises, favored by Jefferson, building up and out of their liberty. Who doesn't go through bouts of loyalty between these two in one lifetimes?

Of course we are not at the beginning of the conflict when word and act meant everything. We are stuck in a place that tells me, "we are not quite the democracy we thought we'd become but we aren't terrible either. Something worked and so we must maintain the nature of the conflict so the game may continue."

Ultimately the "heart" has loyalty to the people since the people are agents of change, innovation, new horizons, new values and so on. The Roman state is favored by the "head" because of the abstract games of political intrigue and the day to day specialist-complexity at the heart of any political state.

The source of most everything good lives in the people. If the people are docile and dilapidated how in the world is there going to be any progress worth the progress we have inherited? And in the fat stages of life a critical mass of people simply want to be left alone to exercise their freedoms as they see fit; raise families, buy and sell as they wish, go to events and engage in life at whatever level it offers to them. And their fat counterparts who constitute the state simply want to have some success and be distinguished as someone conscious of power, structure, and world. There is connection between them.

At this late stage of things the writer is interested in the tiny minority of people who are trying to get things to progress in ways that are indomitable, inevitable, and difficult. He is only interested in those who build and create. He is not interested in auxiliaries to the real life but seeds of new development.

Democracy will stagnate under the weight of the two dominant types in the society. And stagnation leads to a tyranny of one sort or the other because the people seek out the savior able to lift the burden from them by the very act of stagnation. The people have to be their own saviors.

In the long run democracy is proven out by the quality of the people, including the single, solitary person who gets to carry all the contradictions around with him or herself.

March 22, 2011

The Sacrificial Soul

It is my understanding that a person does not sacrifice the bad in life to do something beyond what is normally expected. He sacrifices the good in life that is self-evidently the good in order to try and do something beyond what is normally expected. Soft expectations and soft results can produce a good, soft life.

It is a bittersweet experience. Life demands balance.

What is easy and spoon-fed and accepted without resistance usually ends up very toxic and ensures a large fight in the person so infected.

Hard and easy are difficult to define in modern America.

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I'm reading one of the best accounts of the revolutionary generation I've ever encountered called "Madison and Jefferson." The authors truly peek into the era and come up with a remarkable literary facsimile of the times they lived in. They all knew each other in a manner of speaking; public men that is. And sometimes it appears that they didn't want freedom from English nobility; they wanted to become the nobility themselves. And to do so they had to compromise with the "people" in the colonies. This tension informs that whole generation.

Madison and Jefferson have been two heroes for a long time, Jefferson since childhood. They were both flawed, even ordinary people in some ways but still extraordinary after all the tests they've had to pass. The most severe one had to do with slavery. Even the pragmatic views couched in a sense of humanity don't quite make it. Slavery was around because it made life easier. It was a guilty pleasure for most slave holders. It was greed. And greed, above other failings, is easily disguised by a thousand tricks of the mind.

I think even Madison would be pleased that a black man is president. Jefferson would have had a hearty laugh and shrug his shoulders. The question one would love to pose to them is, "would you have successfully put away the elitism? Would you have recognized your ideas of humanity in the people of modern America?"

I didn't realize Madison was so elitist. Jefferson was not afraid of the democratic man just as long as his own universe was undisturbed.

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The democratic man is only a negative when he drops down into superstition or mass hatred or becomes and is defined as, "one who is lost." Lost amid the huge populations and the need to manipulate them, sell them votes and products, huge machinations of power that he has no connection with but which catalyzes change all around him. Lost because there is no orientation left for the individual but groupism. Lost because he is aware of problems he can't solve, even understand. Lost when life is experienced as an oppressive disillusionment. Lost when he wanders out to discover this wonderful democracy only to find squealing pigs and packs of wild dogs. Lost in the anonymous sound of information beaming through his brain which tells him nothing, advances nothing, teaches nothing, inspires nothing but acts as the powerful agents of something transformative on the planet. Lost in a culture that says it's not enough to contemplate the stars. Lost in a culture that can not love or believe. Lost in the middle of phony money and phony wars. Lost in meaningless arguments argued by meaningless people.

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The fascinating thing is just how difficult it was to sell the Constitution to the people. How tenuous it all was. And standing silent there, somewhere, always the giant figure of Washington.

For the writer the question is always, "has it lost its democratic soul?" In my young days I thought so. Then I thought again and saw a lot of hope for America. Now I'm not so sure.

March 3, 2011

Rants and Raves

Oh politics, you tired charade of half-truths. You want your half-truth to be my full-truth? You believe I'm an idiot and have not experienced the country and world as vaster than your half-truths? I have experienced self and world in ways that make your half-truths seem like the spittle of madmen. In fact, if there is any challenge to "citizenship" it is expressly this: Take all the half-truths and put the pieces together to make a full truth. No, that would make things too perfect and simple. Too much money and jobs are at stake.

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March 22, 2011

March 3, 2011

What premium can be put on opinion? It emerges when the liquidity of the time rushes in and attempts to drown the seed of wisdom. Politics is the dominant source of fluid.

Yet, one is a citizen. One must take part in the affairs of the society.

Yet, one is a man conscious that he is a piddling thing as against the angry beast of society, hungry for victims.

So, we are here in this place, the trees dripping a fine winter rain, contemplating a new horizon of politics. This calls for alertness even as we happily contemplate the future.

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Citizen is King but also Fool.

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The worms, bees, and chitters of the spacious architecture of our government move the law onto the people.

Who the King hires, the Fool must ridicule with a smiling intelligence.

We start with an idealistic state of mind and find nothing but disorder. Without a harmonious family there is no harmonious political state. Those who look to a harmonious political state are looking for the family they wished they had had. Only people who have achieved that sense of harmony can go out beyond the pale of the family and attempt to harmonize political and social situations.

Here I stand, on the space I occupy, and am connected to the objects, laws, customs that roll around me; insolent at time.

I know who is responsible for any trouble that descends into the space. When there is a conflict of interest I know who will mediate it. I know who buys and sells. Into this space I open to those who inspire me. Into this space I open to the President and the mechanisms of power. Into this space collide dream and nightmare as I wake to the sound of owls in the rain.

Into this space I fit the citizen to the great land and the multi-features of the inhabitants and structures.

Into this space I hear the chants of the discontented, the disaffiliated thrown from the womb with rats teeth and threatening to turn earth into blood.

Into this space I invite the universities, their books and professors.



Into this space are the sounds of genius.

Into this space are the insolent comedians.

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In the spaceless avenues the bitter collide.

In the spaceless avenue the chants of revolt are heard.

In the spaceless avenue the madmen roam.

December 24, 2012

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There should always be a playful dichotomy between the 'system' and what is not the 'system.' Most of the arguments against the 'system' are class conditioned.

What one wants to escape is the demoralization of power.

If you cut into the crap of any complexity "too far" nothing is left; its resources are really limited despite all the human fodder thrown into it and it is at that point that very crucial decisions are made. It is at that point that the hardline of ideology can color judgment.

What should bother the citizen is that fellow people don't want you to know any more than they know. There is great resistance to "know the world," in a way that would benefit a liberal democracy. When was it more imperative to "know the world?" Now that it has grown in some complexity with so many influences streaming together to make it up it is simply a necessity. I can understand the intuitive distrust of knowledge, book learning and these sorts of things. It is based on superstition and confirmed, willfully or no, by experience. Intuition fears the unknown. That is, what is known to its own way of knowing. The intellect presents dramatic meaning to them so , sometimes it appears as if the intellect is

denuding the intuition of its meaning. At the same time the people, educated or not, are very sensitive to “effects” and they perceive – to the point of feeling the effects- that the intellect creates those effects through a hundred different agents. And many point to the very incomprehensibility of the world as proof of this current perception.

It's my understanding that democracy and freedom demand the most exacting models whether they happen along today or five thousand years ago. To wear the stimulating models through time is as fine a learning curve as exists and certainly demanding enough for the putative free citizen in America. Of course, these things are either learned in the motions of life or nowhere, most especially in the classroom where the models for students exist on the surface of screens.

The more I learn, the less I fear, the more I do, the more I open up for knowing new things, the more I do the right things. And on and on it goes. What other model would exist for the free, liberal democratic citizen but that? The only alternative would be to wave a magic wand over everyone and tell them they are all knowing and equal and don't have to do or know anything else. "And if a prick is trying to show you up or tell you something then shoot him down."

July 20, 2012

Big Dreams and Liberalism

"But, what did they build?" That is what a writer, finally, only cares about. Yes, in a macro-way the building of the Constitution that has lasted this long is impressive. Great engineering works like the railroad or computer system create new freedoms and values. The endless gadgets and varietal products; the immense space adventure, certainly, contribute to a sense of things happening and moving forward.

This must always be a nation of big dreams, big impossible dreams. Anything less puts it on the slide downward.

Liberalism will come back when it rethinks through all the big issues. It will come back when it has a bold vision that captures the imagination of people. It will come back when it is divested of all the former radicalism.

I suppose the real, personal question is, "are you ashamed of your liberal leanings as a young guy?" No. I did what every good literary imagination does. I held the utopian vision high above everything else and wanted all of reality to push upward to achieve it and then got broken and disillusioned of the idea. Both are part of the deal as far as literary consciousness. You record both. Both have meaning. A nation that would simply squash under foot its dreams of perfection is a dumb and backward one. But one that tries to live as though it is here, with us, is a very foolish one.

I tried to build some level of tolerance in myself. I thought that people should be free to pursue their aspirations. I wasn't going to interfere or criticize any aspiring citizen. I thought government would or could be a useful tool in the development of social goals. I did believe we were headed in the wrong direction as far as the environment, burning of fossil fuels and more than a few other things. Experience has taught me that little can be done unless you have an affluent culture. Affluence is dependent on many things including a strong economy. A young guy hardly recognizes this.

Experience has taught me that government can be an honorable institution but then, so can an old, doddering uncle. It's just that he doesn't know how to do the things you need to get done. And while affluence is a "good" the paradox remains that a culture hypnotized by that snake called money is one that will fail when it is really tested. I am also certain that whatever happens in the future, we still live in a nation-state system and that, ultimately, we must know what it does. The region is the best way but it's also necessary to know how the damn govt. got there in the first place. It's necessary to know the full history of the land from one coast to the other.

It's necessary to know the important things that have happened. It's important to have pride in what has happened; for the good and for the bad that has been rectified.

The body politic shifts slowly but when it does it is a tsunami that can't be stopped by mere words or machines. There are assorted "good" people or people with good characteristics. One is the guy who makes things well, dreams big, sacrifices and so on. Another is the person who works hard, takes care of kids and simply wants a decent life. Another is the professional who wants to improve the profession and uphold its integrity. The variety of good in human beings is enormous and should be noted and celebrated.

I'm not ashamed of my liberal beginnings because I'm not afraid of rectifying mistakes or taking on huge problems or dreaming impossibly large. I never see the conservatives do this because they are spending all their energy on protecting what they have and defending a kind of cartoonish view of the nation, its history, and people.

However, they taught liberals a very valuable lesson. You must have utter loyalty to the foundations which made this country what it is. If you say the foundations were illegitimate because the past had slaves or kept women in the kitchen or cut down forests you will be rejected by the majority of people. There is nothing the people fear the most than the nihilist, whether political or cultural. That is, the person who believes in nothing and will destroy everything to achieve his aim. That is the lesson of the past 40 years or so.

January 9, 2012

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Is It A Democracy Because:

5% of the people are fully developed liberal democratic citizens?

The majority of people affirm it as a democracy by participating in it on some level?

When a problem is perceived popular movements arise to deal with it? The people don't wait for the government to act,

No matter the status in life, people are living with dignity and as much self-reliance as possible and look to a bright future? Is there a perceived current of advancement to give people hope?

All of the above?

Are the basic foundations in place and/or has corruption made the foundation moot? That is, due process, accountability, "government of the people, by the people, and for the people...?"

Is the Constitution is a living document?

The 5% of fully developed citizens would bother me a lot. As this democracy gets squeezed more and more by the pressures of the global scene that 5% may see itself as the "only saviors of democracy" and decide that to save it the democracy must be handed down to those who are fully developed. All it would take is one or two generations of separation and then complete ignorance in the remaining 95%. That could go on for centuries.

On the other hand it sometimes appears so strong one is thrown against himself and has to ask the question, "why bother with these things, democracy is now an instinct in the people and it will reign for eternity." And we know the fatal flaw in that thought.

Perhaps those who think on democracy are busy-bodies with nothing better to do. Perhaps the greatest exemplar of democracy is the quiet man or woman who is working some desolate job, takes care of children and lives with honesty day after day. Perhaps that person is worth all the words spilled on behalf of democracy. "You think too much," they would say. "Do something worthwhile." They are right, I have little doubt about it. Yet we know things end.

We know that a democracy has produced a huge government with, now, immense responsibilities. It acts in my name, among a few hundred million others. It is important that democratic people know what power is up to since that power is "derived" from them. But it is also important that a citizen go beyond the two prevalent tendencies in a democracy: the utter distrust of government and the complete obedience to it. Experience and knowledge are supposed to break the hypnotism of those attitudes and lead the citizen to higher forms of knowing so that he or she can make practical decisions about policy, long-term goals and so on.

Why should a democratic person give up his ability to know what power is doing to those who either want to destroy the power or keep it maintained exactly the way it is? If nothing else democracy destroys the old tendency to turn political power into a series of myths and expects the whole of it to think. Democracy is a thinking person's system.

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Politics is a wicked sort of obligation for the free citizen. It says, "we are limited, temporary beings and will be out of here before you know it but....." And there's all that differentiation that goes on: nation, state, community, self. Why should I be more interested in America, as a nation, than Uganda or Romania? It's because I am compelled to by the ability of America to tax me, arrest me, use force in my name, and obligate me to follow rules and regulations and so on. It puts me in a system whether I agree to it or not. And it works only if, in a state of freedom I am tested as to the idea and accept the terms of the contract between myself and the nation. From that moment on I am in a constant state of flux between being pissed off, in fits of laughter, or something in between.

It is orientation if nothing else. Especially if a person is tested to the limit on his relationship to the country of birth. A good test will pull a free person through some dark material and he will have to fight to get to the other side. And in those spaces where is one?

What about 56%? That would be healthier.

May 22, 2014

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America, you hungry beast, you chase me from your favorite lair.

America, she who swallows us whole with a dance and a wish. She who promises we will be cleansed by her rivers.

She who takes us to the snow-capped mountains and says, "now you are fit to live."

She who is trapped in cities and loves it until the idea of cities is transformed.

She who rumbles on the back of trucks and trains.

She who tells me, "go back to your island, go back to your familiarity and meet me as you are and not as you want to be."

She who gives me the Pacific Ocean and the history of ships.

She who has a nest for poets.

She who has old and bearded men who run marathons.

She who has men and women who tend children in parks.

She who has men and women who scorn politics.

She who drives out evil spirits and makes them dance in public.

She who lays out a fine table for the senses.

She who frightens us with the volume of her aspirations.

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At some point a decent citizen will take stock of his relation to the country of his birth. It has lodged in him and is difficult to shake loose. America is there like a mountain. In my young days I was thoroughly unconscious of it as anything but a few ideas, concepts, images presented in various forms. "The US has done this and that." "America now does this." "The U.S. stands for this." At a particular point I realized that "America" represented something that was "beyond me" in the sense that nature is something "beyond me" if I assume "me" is the identity which I see as myself. And that "me" and the world that I know "through me" was smaller than the category of "America." There were millions of others in it. There were other regions than the one I lived in. There were basic and different ways to see the reality of the country. Simultaneously I saw it through the past and future. The future represented various facts that I have written other places. This future had a driving force to it. It revolved around questions of survival, personal and abstract. It was attached to physical facts that were self-apparent. I saw various forms of the future. This was a sense of distortion, a sense that this civilization was in the midst of something no one really understood. There was a sense of evolution, of a great leap, expansion and so forth. There was vague but strong and extraordinary claims made about the future.

Then there was the present. It was self-apparent and locked into a specific way of doing things. It was the expansion of something, some of which had relation to what I was thinking about. Most of it had no relation. This present was daily existence; forms of city, the rhetoric of politics, the rationalizations that were used to explain it. It was every boiling, bulling ghostly thing.

So, in one sense, it was concept vs. practical relation. My dreams vs. the hard-edge of pragmatic reality which had a wooden door leading into a dim lit room cloudy in low murmurs and expensive nick-naks. This was the challenging and beguiling part of life.

So that, after a time, that practical reality became a representation of something once it was too horrible to admit that the pragmatic world was stronger than my own concepts. That seemed intolerable and oppressive to me.

So I spent time attempting to describe these representations and what that pragmatic reality was saying to me. Some of that was in the form of ideas and some of it was in the form of critically thinking about organization

The past had no attraction. It had no *raison d'être* since the future was going to be so different than anything previously. Since the present presented this struggle between concept and reality, the past appeared sentimental, even the fearsome aspects of it. This was mainly because the past had not been disturbed by machinery on any scale, explorations of space, incredible levels of affluence, nuclear weapons, etc. The past had been sunk down in primitive emotion. It had been driven by the ridiculous and absurd. At most, I allowed myself the knowledge of the past 100 years, most of which seemed modern enough.

However, at a particular time I became saturated by the claims of the present and future and turned to the past. I began to see that many of the accomplishments of the past were extraordinary; that there were deeds and thoughts that made the present look ridiculous and absurd. That much of the present was desiccated by its hubris. So for a time I immersed myself in the past. The past is a powerful magic. If one assumes that every tendency available to human nature is available and at the most we, in the present, can re-arrange the past and future but can't change these tendencies then the past and future become semi-worlds of pleasure and pain that one bears as gracefully as possible. After a while it became apparent that most instances of the present were made-up of instances from the past, so the past became important as the source but just as the source and the river are different, so to the source of development is different from the development itself. There are similar characters parading on the stage of history even if they did different things. And it was true that men are erecting and destroying systems of authority and power for a similarity of dreams.

The present was successfully destroying the past, the American past, so that was not available. And it was not confronting the central problem of the American spirit, to wit: America was no longer flying under the radar, was not a backward nation filled with bumpkins, but was slotted where the great empires in history had been, especially with the demise of Western Europe.

America was at an unprecedented place in its history and the only orientation was to see what happened to others at that level. The privileges of a great power also bring in nightmares. It was apparent to me growing up in the 60's and 70's that a great fight was occurring between the native democratic conscience and the responsibilities of being a world power. The political animal was stretched from one end to the other on this tension. It was either going to maintain and, in fact, improve from this level or begin a long, painful, and slippery slide down into a morass.

When I thought in those terms I was brought back into the present time, disquieting as it appeared to be.



And it did appear that the political animal was divided between the guy saying the sky was falling and the other guy with buried head in sand, ass in the air, and wanting everyone to kiss that ass. It still can look that way.

But then, what is America? Sometimes it appears what the advertisers say it is. But if that is all it is then it's demise is assured. So, again, it's up to the people.

It was and, perhaps, still is easy to dismiss democracy with contempt. I don't believe anyone in good conscience would do so because the only alternatives are not friendly to freedom, poetry, music, beauty, and truth. Our outrage is usually how misspent our powers are. OK. Rally the powers and do something good for gods sake.

Well, I had to deal with the political animal and it is usually wilder than the sexual animal.

No one likes power that they believe should belong to them solely. And the human being is, by nature, a tyrant wannabee.

Democratic men and women don't fare well in Assyria.

As Mumford and others pointed out years ago, Assyria creates Assyrians and not liberal democrats.

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When I was a young guy I believed in utopia---it was a combination of the times, the genetic make-up of my family, my own disposition. "If people were reasonable they would know how to live together peacefully and with their needs met." The puncturing and fracturing of this myth initiates a new stage of life, one filled with horror and delight. "Ah, it is evident to me that we do not live in the commune!" But then, what is it that we live in?

It is a world of power and effects; iniquity and pleasure. And so there is a long process of developing relations to these things. A citizen doesn't have political power but he sees that political power consists in making law, making war, making taxes. So he studies and develops a relation to law, war, and taxes. A citizen doesn't have the economic power of businesses so he studies business, markets, banking, credit, and so on. And a writer notes that a man with a million dollars can do much more than a man with one

dollar. Well, there are two things a man with one dollar can do; one is pray and the other is create. After all, it is the man with one dollar who must learn how to transform hate, bitterness, resentment, sorrow, powerlessness into truth and beauty. The man with a million dollars will try to buy it for himself but he never produces it.

Utopia is a fine American sport. Could it be anything other than an unrequited utopia? One could almost make the statement that between the utopian dream and its frustration America is made. You could almost make that statement. The utopia is thought to be a thing money can buy and there is hardly any vision of it once the money fever sets in. So one ends up buying the fantasies of someone else or else mere desire.

And we understand along the way that utopia would simply be a new seed ground for discontent if nothing else. The human being is too restless for perfection. Give us the imperfection that improves itself bit by bit as we edge up near the darkness.

Ironically, America cannot be saved by its materialism as will be tested in the upcoming decade. It will have to sacrifice and change because of the huge deficits and poor economy. It's another gauntlet thrown at the feet of the people who are always the ones who save it or not. "Will you sacrifice on behalf of the future, make changes in lifestyle, substitute intelligence for speed and power, so that the ship can right itself up?" Or will you let go of it and let nature take its course? After all, if America declined and became an isolated morass in the world it would still have a government and wealthy people in it. Chad has a government and wealthy people in it. The difference is that in the U.S. the people take charge of the willfulness of the nation, they take up the challenges, and they bend both the government and wealth to that will.

A wasteful and inefficient life will finally bite itself on the rear-end.

The globe is presenting a huge data base about how to do things. It is a huge elaboration of the six or seven functions of being a human being. It produces delight if not confusion.

Where is the center? It is here. And the circumference stretches through the region. And insides are outsides as the citizen becomes the perfect observer of all the insides. And the flows that the center experiences is experienced in all centers, everywhere. And the thing to covet more than any other are sincere and deep relations to what matter.

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I do love contemplating the seeds of American freedom, liberty, and democracy. I hate the way these words are distorted and used at times but then who knows for certain?

What I have studied of America is part of myself, a good part. It is the people winning freedom from those who merely have title to it.

So new channels and grooves; new men and women.

When the channels and grooves; men and women grow old and clogged up move on to new ones.

Burst out to where the words flow freely. To where they are water itself.

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Democracy makes “belief and faith” in politics impossible. We have faith and belief in the system of governance and are grieved by its layers of complexity that has allowed the citizen very few options. The citizen, if nothing else, is the initiator of new dreams or aspirations. If you look closely at current political debate there are hot empty words without any substance behind them. There may be a kind of cult-thought to them that appeals to large groups of people but the emotions generated now are little different than at any time since the first fight between Adam and Eve or down in the valleys of East Africa. The emotions are very simple. People don’t like power. And power wants to control people so that their power is maintained. It’s not rocket science. But what is power in a democracy? And power used to live well, wisely, happily, productively, with meaning is superior to living with the responsibilities of power. And the people are rightfully angry when power is not seen as responsibility but entitlement. Whether that is the case or not is another story.

The citizen’s best role is that of planting the new seeds. The risk is that it is all for nothing and the seeds dug up by hyenas or blown away by strong winds.

Refusal and invention.

It’s obvious as well that a democracy that bogs down gets angry and even a bit dangerous after awhile. When it loses faith in the future it is one ornery, dangerous beast.

If I were the Chief Potentate I would insist that people start thinking about the future as if it matters. And I would insist that the only credible statements about government comes from a creative angle of attack; a freshness that can't be drowned in the vomit the backed-up Now appears to be.

Is the power oppressive? That is the central question. Is power deliberately keeping people down and out? If so then political remedy is necessary.

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I do think America will be strong into the 21st century. Two things that Americans have to come to terms with: 1- dealing with the tremendous complexity of government not to mention life itself which alienates people from the get-go. How can a free people do anything, make any decision if they are fully ignorant of the mechanisms that run the machine daily? They do try to judge, assess, and critique bills and policies but the problem is a lot deeper than that. That is, from a democratic point of view. In a tyranny, of course, the people only need to know how to wipe their ass. And 2- how do Americans resolve a democratic conscience with the facts of being a world power? Where does the one break the other? And if one is broken what does that mean we have become or are becoming?

A culture like America doesn't do well simply replicating its own past successes. It must know them, respect them, fuse them, synthesize them and move to sparkling new adventures.

The best stance toward America is a difficult one. To simply not be afraid of it. That simple act of secular piety reaps a lot of rewards.

I wish the American experiment well. I want it to exceed itself. I would love to see it become what it potentially could become. I don't see it in the politics or the mass culture. Americans can at times remind me more of the dead molded bodies in Pompey than the vitality in Pericles Athens. And what is wrong with Pompey? "Come to Pompey and end the dream with the sated and complacent!" All that remains of them are their gleaming teeth.

December 4, 2013

SYRIA

There are two conditions that make for bad leadership. One is the no-nothingness, empty type such as George Bush who was simply a mouthpiece for Cheney and Rumsfeld. And the other is one who thinks too much and should have remained in the university such as our present leader. The crisis in Syria is so crucial it's difficult to know where to begin. We know this: President Obama is between a very ugly rock and a very cold sobering hard place. And the only way he gets clear and clean is if his military strike is so precise and perfect no one is killed on the ground (as in innocent women, children, or old men) and most of the chemical weapons destroyed. If he does nothing in what will most likely be a no vote next week then America's role in the world diminishes considerably, at least for the remainder of his administration. And there is one country who will benefit greatly without lifting a finger or losing an ounce of credibility, mainly China. It's an old geopolitical strategy; blunt your geopolitical rival using other actors to do the dirty work. By voting against a UN resolution China has encouraged Assad to point his criminal finger at the president and say, "You are either all-in or all-out." Obama can't be all-in at this point. He will be all-out by the end of this process. China wins. America's capacity to do anything substantial in the world will diminish. China will feel more confident in controlling its sea lanes and coastal region.

And, of course, the crisis in Syria and the middle-east will continue, will escalate and only fate knows what will happen. It will be revealed to a passive American audience. The only caveat to that is if Assad does something so outrageous that the people and Congress embrace President Obama and give him consent to go in and protect American interests. I think he's playing against types in the Middle East who may not be as book smart as Obama but are far more street smart. The ignorance of the president, if not naiveté, is transparent and the most treacherous, dirty area in the world have played him well.

Even in college debate one is taught the 51-49 rule: If you believe 51% of your argument you must argue as if you believe 100% of it or you will lose points with the audience. President Obama is like a Shakespeare character articulating both sides of the conflict to an audience that shows his ambiguity and the fact that, at this very moment, he doesn't have a clue. And as we've stated before, "if the Commander-in-chief doesn't know, no one does."

The argument is a sound one based on humanitarian reasons. But the humanitarian reasons are nested in a whole mess of things that will make the humanitarian reasons escalate beyond our capacity to respond. And the fact that treaties have prohibited the use of chemicals is a good reason. I heard the first mention today of the fact Syria never signed off on that UN resolution years ago. If the President stayed on these reasons, negated opposition, make the case as Secretary of State Kerry makes the case he might get more support. But that support is eroding fast, especially among Democrats who are reading the political tea leaves pretty quickly.

China wins, Hillary loses. In 2016 the American people will want someone to restore American strength ala Reagan after Carter. Hillary, more experienced than Obama, still doesn't have the mojo to pull off

that leadership. I don't see anyone in the Republican Party who has the experience or mojo. The shape of the next president is beginning to take some form at any rate. Where is he or she? And should we be worried about bringing in an American warrior to lead?

Obviously President Obama made a mistake in withdrawing national interest from the Middle East to the Far East. He was the good professor reading all the right analysis and in the long run he's correct. But there is a lot of unfinished business in the middle-east and we have now no power, soft or hard, to shape it to our ends. So we are going to have to react out of necessity which is always an unpleasant, unwinnable solution. The President should have acted the moment he saw and felt the danger of Assad's use of chemical weapons. He should have been well-prepared once he enunciated the red line. He should have been consulting with members of congress. He should have been developing an overarching strategy for this whole region to shape toward our interests, if that is at all possible. Ten years of war in Afghanistan and Iraq, not to mention Vietnam tells me that we can't shape anything. We are shaped, we don't do the shaping. And we are in bad shape.

Sometimes tragedy is too in the process to make statements about it. We can only witness and try to learn a few lessons. Hamlet's ambiguity brings down the old order but he is sacrificed in the process to catalyze a new one. And I listened to Obama's soliloquy at the press conference. "To attack or not to attack, that is the question." And the answer is, "no leader asks questions like this this far along in the process." The moment he mentioned red lines he should have been getting things ready, he should have consulted with congressional leaders, allies, etc. All the weaknesses mentioned through his administration have now leapt out of the shadows in this one crisis. No real congressional relationships, no real diplomatic relationships, no real relationship with his political base. Or, relationships based on the fact that he happens to be the president and they all want something from him. But nothing like Present Bush, the 1st or Reagan or Clinton or any president I'm aware of.

It's a tragedy because the slippage in US prestige and leadership will be felt long and hard. We can recover but we will have to react to a world that shapes itself through forces we can hardly understand or do anything about. China wins. They studied this president and the conditions he finds himself in, financially and politically and now they are freer to advance their agendas than before. Whether that involves Taiwan is a big question but certainly they are going to move more forcefully to control the sea lanes in and out of the China Sea.

It's moments like these that bring into focus the fact that since the development of nation-states there have been one or two profound breakdowns per century that has brought on catastrophe. Whether it was Napoleon or the Civil War or WWI and WWII a transfiguration takes place because the complexity of forces at play are too much to control and a small vibration, sounded at the right time can send lethal waves through the whole edifice until it is revealed as a deadly house of cards. That scenario is waiting down the line. Not yet, not yet but beginning to germinate.

And China can now side with the Pope! How can you argue with the Pope? Any good Communist knows that much.

I don't want to give up on the President. I voted for him twice. But I also mentioned in his first year that he had a fatal flaw in trusting in his own intellectual superiority and that he would get thrown a zinger at some point that would confound him and get him very muddled.

And if he does withdraw from the middle-east making it clear that Israel and the Persian Gulf's cheap oil are off limits then put all the remaining intellect and passion he is capable of in solving the domestic problems perhaps he can rescue some of his legacy. A big if at this point.

What we forget is that the world in large measure has its own strategic plans for the US. It's not well formulated but it does call on the US not to interfere as much as it has in the past, not to police the world and to treat all entities equally. In other words "become something useful to us America and follow our lead." That may simmer things down for a little while but in the long run it will create the vacuum history and nature abhor.

We should never lose sight of the fact that in this democracy public officials, whether elected, appointed, or hired work for the people. They must always ask the question, "what good or what bad is this going to produce for the American people?" If they don't address that question the state itself, an inhuman object, begins to dictate the terms and the state wants as much control and power as it can; first on behalf of the people, then on behalf of itself and its historic destiny. It will use individual human beings to do the deed.

Are the decisions going to be on behalf of the people or on behalf of the state?

A citizen has a wide range of resources to tap into in trying to determine whether his or her needs are being met by the public sector. Reading experts, reading foreign press, listening to fellow citizens, watching, sensing. The analysis is as good as you want it; at whatever level you are prepared for or, more precisely, at the level you believe. Some analysis strains to be art. Much commentary makes assumptions that go unchallenged. One assumption is that without American presence the world would collapse into chaos and would not be able to deal with what emerged. This assumption comes from the experience in WWII where, indeed, the world plunged into chaos, the U.S. was unprepared and order was restored only with a maximum effort by the British, Americans, and Russians primarily. Much of foreign policy has been dictated by the fear that the world could plunge into chaos without American

intervention, either economically, politically, or militarily. Another assumption is that the mind can be trained to "know the world" at an extraordinary level through long practice and study. And if not one mind many minds working loosely together under the sponsorship of a government. Another assumption is that states are either ascending, plateauing, or declining. The truth is that if we were able to know at the level that is required to bring order and justice to the world we wouldn't have the problems that exist. There's a failure in our knowing what the world is up to. That's an assumption and it emerges whenever you look at a situation like ISIS or Iraq and try to make sense of it.

I can understand the dilemma President Obama finds himself in. On the one hand his instincts and recent history tell him to be very cautious in this region. Yet, all it will take is one minor terrorist incident in the US to trigger massive pressure to act decisively against this ISIS group.

ISIS is a suicide cult like Jonestown. It is attractive to young people who feel powerless and see an opportunity to seize history by the throat. As Nathan Field in *The Arabist* says, "For a growing number of young men, Islamic State's utopianism offers a sense of purpose, meaning and masculinity that they don't believe they can obtain by playing according to the conventional rules of society." What is the difference between ISIS then and your 60's style commune? Other than the men in communes were trying to transform the lack of masculine models into something not-masculine rather than uber-masculine? Will McCants mentions in the Nov. 16, 2015 *Foreign Policy* the manual, "Management of Savagery", written soon after the start of the Iraq War. It, "advocates attacking civilians in enemy lands to deter their governments from interfering in jihadi state-building projects or to provoke them into overreacting and thus exhausting themselves." Provoking them to overreacting because the jihadists know their own limitations. "The usual Islamic restrictions on warfare should be suspended, he argues, so the jihadis can fight fire with fire." A group like this depends on a sense of adrenaline that increases with time. However, the adrenaline can also be a cause of steep demoralization if it appears nothing is achieved by attacking the west.

It's the most treacherous area in the world. Who can you trust? Who is really loyal to whom? Who is really supporting the terrorists? This area produced the Hittites, Assyrians, Persians, Akkadians, Elamites, Babylonians, Kassites and have been fighting for three to four thousand years. It either takes enormous arrogance or stupidity to think you can go in and dress it up the way you want to.

The question is always, "what is best for the American people and why?" Is it best to repeat mistakes that have been made just a decade ago when President Bush decided to invade Iraq? It certainly plays into the strategy of these nut cases who need to fuel their adrenaline with fight.

The self-interest of American citizens is self-preservation. There is general agreement that if you attack ISIS, kill Sunni civilians you simply encourage terrorists from different corners of the world to join in the fight or to create as much havoc in the US as they can to divert attention. The reports that some of ISIS



funding comes from Saudi Arabia and other wealthy donors in the region tell me that significant players want the fight to continue with or without ISIS. The end result would be more Americans put at risk. We can't kill all of them at one time. Our fear is a few of them who will get to the US and wreak havoc in an American city. That's a justifiable fear but better handled by intelligence and police agencies.

How can you "defeat" an army that can easily dissolve as an army and become embedded in the citizens of these cities and towns? It reminds me of the final years of the Civil War when Lincoln, Grant and others were very worried that after the war, devoted and battle-hardened confederates would go back home and form guerilla squads to menace the reconstruction project and create instability. Jefferson Davis wanted it to take place. It was the leadership of Robert E. Lee that convinced the rebel soldier to go home and put the war behind them. I don't see that happening with the fanatics. Time is always on their side and they know it. In fact, it may be easier to deal with them if they have a "state" that we can declare war on.

Then again, the Middle-East is becoming a testing ground for American resolve with the whole world watching very carefully. We're either being hung out to dry or will do the wise thing and let the terrorists defeat themselves. They are already divided between a core of true believers, mercenaries and a rag-tag of young people who are enticed with some spending money and a girlfriend. I don't see this organization holding together for that long, especially as they try and produce a phony caliphate in the emptiness of northern Iraq. Destroying the sources of their revenue is half the battle. Once they can't pay their mercenaries or support the infrastructure of some of these towns they've captured support will drop sharply. Our only worry about this group is that they will send soldiers or encourage terrorist's ala in Paris to strike against the West to provoke the West into either withdrawing and/or committing all-in that will feed the addiction. I think the resolve of the American people to protect itself in a meaningful way is intact. I hope the resolve of the people to have the government act with wisdom and prudence is intact. President Obama has attempted to be prudent and was left with a terrible legacy by the previous administration but I am coming to the conclusion that he's in something beyond his capacity and that we've lost an opportunity to act decisively in the Middle-East. That's one citizen's take on it. And putting a militant idiot in his place is not the answer. The old art of statecraft needs to return that is prepared to deal with whatever shakes out in that region due to its own multiplicity of actions. That carries its own risks as does all out intervention. But intervention sounds like occupation at this point. And it would occur just as our own government is deeply divided. When confidence in leadership has been shaken it's better to pull back and regroup rather than strike wildly and boldly out of panic.

And if the decision is a military one it must be "all-in" or nothing. This is what the battlefield in the last fifteen years has dictated.

It would mean sending in a multi-national army, sweep the ground of ISIS, let them fade back into the local populations, establish a presence in the old ISIS territory and let time rotten the resolve of most of the mercenary soldiers.

One thing the new crisis has done, since the attack on Paris, has been to sharpen all and every attention on terrorist movements from one region to the next, one country to the next. This sort of intelligence would be sufficient to cut off large movements of ISIS fighters to, say, Libya.

There are persuasive arguments that point out if we do nothing, if we wait then this problem will get meatier and much more difficult so that when the crucial US interests are threatened like oil or Israel we will be faced with a greater problem than we have now. This is where the decision on the part of Obama and the administration has to be so crystal clear, so precise, so orientated to a stated objective that we can remove ourselves when the objective has been reached.

Excellent arguments exist saying no real military solution is available in this region unless it's done by Arabs themselves, especially Sunni's. Kai Bird has a persuasive essay in the November 19th issue of Foreign Policy about why President Obama is doing the right thing in refusing to listen to militant cries from the Republicans and others. It comes down to the futility of fighting this kind of war in this region and the necessity to tend to the root causes. That's a reasonable way of looking at it but this is not a reasonable area.

They can't be defeated in the sense that there would be no formal-signing-of-surrender-on-the-Missouri moment. They can be profoundly harassed especially if they have borders, however informal, that they define as their own.

What satisfies the proposition that, "the American people be secure and free of the predations of other people?" It puts more pressure on the intelligence and police communities to do the job of security. And while it seems very menacing to have small squads go out in foreign countries to create havoc eventually the novelty of it will wear off for the murderers. The military option is problematic at this time because we know now that it's either all in or nothing. Either you make a commitment as profound as the one in WWII or don't bother. Short of a massive attack on the west, even larger than 9/11 I don't see that happening.

And one could further speculate that what a huge invasion and multi-national force would, in essence, try to do would be to restructure the whole of that region and have access to every nook and cranny the terrorists can hide in as happened in Japan and Germany. I don't think that idea would have much support anywhere but it's the logical conclusion to some of the talk I have been hearing. And this citizen did speculate that it was a prime reason why the Bush Administration went into Iraq with the consequences we are all too familiar with.

If the US were to do nothing, in fact, withdraw the military and let the people directly involved solve the conflict between the religious factions and the political power play between Iran and Saudi Arabia what would happen? A citizen needs to ask this question. On the one hand the US is responsible for some of the disintegration that's taken place, on the other a region is responsible for its own well-being. We have proven that we can do little in this area. We have to make it clear that we will intervene if the flow of oil is threatened or if the state of Israel is threatened. We don't interfere with the sectarian conflicts in India or other parts of the world why should we do it in this region? If some sort of seismic shift is occurring in that region why not let the people who speak the language, share the borders, share the religion, share history and culture determine the how and where-to's of that shift? The chief concern is that China will move in and become a power broker in the region, indicating another fall in the dominoes of American hegemony. No one knows that will happen but it makes sense if China is so dependent on Middle-East oil. Maybe they would get a bitter taste of being a "world power."

I listen to the debate in the Senate and they talk about "leadership." The opportunity for American leadership in this region collapsed on the invasion of Iraq in 2003. And please read credible reports on the way the Bush Administration politicized some of the intelligence to make their case to invade and hold them accountable.

The immediate concern is Syria and what to do about Assad. And that's a Pandora's box no one in the West seems to want to open. And now with Russia helping him the situation is pretty murky. It adds another complex straw on the camel's back.

It does amaze me from time to time to realize that for all the experts who develop strategy, tactics, policy and commentary so much could go wrong. Starting with the faulty intelligence on Hussein's stockpile of WMD. And as I said at the time if the President doesn't know no one knows. And it's obvious now that President Obama didn't want anything to do with this area for whatever reason. By taking this passive role he is forced to react which is not a good place for a leader to be. He'll always be a step or two behind the deeply involved actors. Saying that doesn't mean it would be best to stitch together a massive military effort to counteract the passivity. I don't see President Obama doing what would need to be done militarily which would be an invasion of Syria, taking down Assad, while pushing from the south through ISIS territory and pinch the army at the border. It's not in Obama's DNA. And that sort of commitment would be quite dangerous with no guarantee of anything. The "can-doism" of Bush is now being counteracted by "can't do nothingism" policy because the Bush policy was so botched.

I don't think ISIS has the ability to take down an organized state. Do I feel threatened here in the SF Bay Area by ISIS? Not really. I'm more terrified of the freeways. Are the American people's interest at stake? How? Why? Where? Oil is hardly mentioned anymore because of our production of oil by fracturing. In fact, I saw where we import more oil from Africa than the Middle-East. Oil is a "world commodity" and its price does have a large impact on American economy. But that oil in the Middle-East is more important to China, India, and Japan. So, why aren't they defending it?

Most of the credible analysts and commentators think a mixture of containment and reform/diplomacy in, especially, Iraq is what is needed. Is Iraq beyond reforming? And how much can America bend these governments to its will even with some of the incentives the U.S. has? The largest force I've seen discussed is between 10,000 and 15,000.

Long ago analysts' predicted that the end of the cold war would precipitate a lot of local, ethnic/religious wars in places like Africa, Yugoslavia, the Middle-East and that people would pine one day for the good old days of the cold war. I'm not sure it's at that point but I can see what they were getting at.

It sharpens the necessity to articulate the conduct of America in the world going forward in the 21st century. Isolation is not an answer. Savorism is not an answer. We can't go in and then pull out, we did that. Time is not on our side as free people get distracted, lose interest, move on with more urgent business while those who are passionate about their agenda, like radical islamists, simply wait for an opening.

That's especially true for all those citizens whose wages have fallen or remained stagnant and who drive over pitted, pot-holed roadways, who watch a government that can't govern itself much less a whole crazy region like the Middle-East, and who continually pay an unfair share of taxes. This is the citizen that the Obama administration has to justify itself to as it develops its response to the ISIS threat.

November 21, 2015

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Job creation is one of the central issues in America today. The main political issue is the dominance of money that runs interference between the people and their representatives. This is a perception at any rate and we all know perception is reality when it comes to politics. The key though is to listen to the across-the-board complaint about the influence of money; it comes from the left, right, moderates, rural, urban all sectors, every slice of the pie is upset. Money has played a huge role from the very beginning without question. But there was a greater sense of "nation" all the way through World War II than there is now. Therefore there is less consensus available to have any large public will to rectify it. Writing about it does not change the situation but we say, "until you solve this problem your democracy will be an embarrassment to the future, good luck."

Jobs must be created in areas of need to get the vital notion of upward mobility back into the culture. The lack of jobs brings a predictable series of cultural facts: young kids give up, young girls get pregnant and on welfare, the infrastructure crumbles, the police get tougher, the guy who flashes around a lot of dope cash is far more credible than the "system" and its complicated procedures to determine success or failure. It doesn't matter whether the poor exist in cities and are racial minorities or whether they exist in rural areas and are white, the poor are always plagued by the lack of good jobs in an environment already diminishing in hope.

Two central political problems exist for approaching this problem in the election coming up. One is the argument that billions, if not trillions of dollars have gone into poverty programs, support programs and it has not effectively pushed the bottom up toward the middle. And the other is that each ethnic group has its own agenda rather than for "the poor." And it is usually poor whites who go Republican and poor minorities go Democrat and a useless struggle ensues over what sorry program will be eliminated or added, what new tax will be initiated or deleted. These different advocacies have to, eventually, compete with each other and politics ends up deadlocked. If an individual conscience takes on the problem earnestly he ends up burnt-out or joining some dreadful, nihilistic group that wants to destroy everything. The beneficiaries of these politics are those who have the assets to weather every downturn and make out like bandits during upswings. It is a problem beyond the individual and depends on an across the board agreement that a problem exists and that the national will is behind the effort.

Most of the proposals put forward today are earnest pap because none of the proposals take into account how difficult the problem really is. And yet every political type who thinks about it understands that a culture that is classically divided between "rich and poor" has a well-known fate. The rich are protected from having to deal with the problem and the poor eventually get a champion to overturn the system; the system in this case is the one established by the Constitution. This is the stake today.

It's very difficult to sit and come up with some answers. Jobs are an answer but the public sector and private sector have a difficult time creating new and good jobs because they can't control all the forces working on the economy like globalization or technical innovation. The welfare state came in to provide a salve to keep everything moving and making sure America doesn't have streets like Paris before the revolution or Dicken's London.

The best solution to this point is public works programs that give people a living wage but that won't happen until there is a sense of "society" that is not evident at this time. A sense, that is, that the top is connected to the bottom in a significant way. Intellectual leaders don't dare advance those ideas that would defy or transcend gender, racial, ethnic or religious identity. And political leaders won't promote that idea because they know it's an impossibility unless you have the political will from a large group like the middle class. There are good ideas about microloans, encouraging entrepreneurship in poor areas, raising minimum wages, subsidizing education and so on. But who believes any of these things or twenty more things will eradicate poverty or even put a dint into it? Perhaps the issue lacks drama or sexiness

but a healthy society doesn't want the real drama of disruption and high social tension and fear prevailing over sense.

Two things have to be in place. On the one hand there has to be new, creative, and imaginative approaches to the whole idea of poverty and upward mobility. It starves for a new angle of attack. Without that happening you have a morass of used up ideas and ennui when it comes to dealing with it. Policy makers have to decide whether they need to infuse poor areas with capital or to find ways and means to pluck out talented, ambitious poor people and lift them on a better platform than being in poor areas. And on the other hand you have to get the middle-class to see how necessary it is, how healthy it is to have this upward mobility from the poor to the middle-class. This is politically difficult when the middle-class feels itself under fire but that is the essential political ingredient . The era of splitting into ethnic groups and carrying these banners for "our group" is on its last legs. That turned off the middle-class, if not scared them from time to time.

When you listen to sincere, well-meaning spokespersons for the ills of urban poverty they always raise the specter of historical racism. And to deny racism, the legacy of slavery, and discrimination is sheer stupidity. The fact of the matter, however, is that there are more poor white people than poor people of color. And why are they poor? Many are living out a legacy of poverty, going back generations. A difficult political question arises then, "If I can't blame my poverty on my race, then what do I blame it on?" And since there is no good answer but a vague reference to "economic forces," the poor whites turn to very reactionary voices in the political arena. This becomes, then, an effective block versus the attempt to devise policy for inner city poverty.

What the poor often need is visible proof that life can move upward.

May 20, 2015

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Democracy works at the local level. As it moves from the local it gets less and less democratic although all kinds of cultural signs reinforce the idea that the whole is a democracy. Habits of democracy are learned at the local level and if they aren't learned there can't be learned anywhere. All life could be said to live locally and it's why you'll never achieve a "world govt" or anything close to it. The local can be dominated by tribalism, religion, creed, race, industry etc. but there is where most people live and work.

Democracy was important as an idea worth struggling with but I had no control over what I stage of the system I happened to be born into. It wasn't the beginning, it isn't the end. It is somewhere. If it is

unalterably corrupt and too large for the authentic benefits of democracy while the people are totally alienated from it while pursuing their personal goals then time rolls it out. Experience teaches a citizen that he or she will see the gamut of all-in to all-out when it comes to interest in the mature democracy. All I could do is find the ability to remain connected to liberal democratic values and sensibility along with some spiritual values carved from the painful parts of life.

Freedom and its reality.

Freedom and its great extensions.

Freedom and its risks.

Freedom and its obligations.

These are a few of the relevant categories to try and define when thinking on democracy.

Theories of society learned in college lose their punch and logic when a person is thrown into the real society and experiences every contradiction possible. He finally comes to the conclusion that theory is exclusion and bread for the conformist. Saying that, we do have the freedom to develop new ideas of how people should live in society. The experiments usually goes botch and is abandoned by the future but regardless. More importantly we have the freedom to live out principles, even in large communities. If I am gay I'm not staying in Alabama, I'm heading for San Francisco which exists in the same putative society, under the same Constitution. This is a privileged state and only exists because of the maturity of the democracy, its affluence, and its educational system and so on. It's also apparent that a free society is vulnerable to true believers who can develop a sense of society, gain confidence and initiate dreams of power. Counter ideas are thrown up to meet this challenge and, eventually, the experiment blends in with the on-going culture. It's not pretty but it does exist in the context of the valuable components of due process, due diligence, and transparency, crazy as it appears sometimes. That said why not have new principles of society by persons who are moved to do so? Isn't this the essence of trust that goes to the bottom of whether democracy succeeds or fails? If a clot of people in upper New York live out a new principle of society that leaps out of the region and proves itself out in practice why not? Eventually, as happened to the counter-culture, principles make a way to the regional and state level as in California where they can be adopted and tested out. The good ones can often create aspects of the future.

An original principle of society would have to guarantee that very thing. Since fundamentalism, Marxism, and fascism to take a few examples, cannot do that they are not theories of society. If it is able to convince most people that its view is correct and all experimentation, all variety, all ideas should be cut down before they get started then the whole first principle has been compromised and unable to check the one belief from consuming all. That doesn't stop the true believer from forming a self-conscious community, testing the ideas out and then letting the culture decide whether it's interested in the idea or new model of living.

I would like to believe that an American is that person who can experience the society fully, in all its dimensions and out of that experience create something new, profound, and enriched beyond anyone's imagination.

The test is whether it has fully embraced the complete society which includes religions, histories, ethnicities, regions, documents, examples of a variety of action and so forth.

A theory of the universe plays little or no part in the formation of society. After all if we are cosmic accidents it doesn't answer why we kill, band together, develop "politics" and a structure of law. You could speculate "well, what created the universe created ourselves, therefore these things emerge out of the universe's intention of itself, ergo God." But that would simply reproduce the formulas for conflict that have existed in the past and which the founding fathers guarded against by giving freedom of religion and separation of powers as base bottom principles. Pragmatism always held out as the answer since it said, whatever works to keep things on the up and up, productive, leaning toward the future is the right course. But then, pragmatic answers in one generation may be obsolete in the next because of these sweeping changes people like to talk about. So we are always a guinea pig not really certain that our solutions have any bearing on the future. This is why our secular selves are transitory and exist for the benefit of the now and a very short-term future.

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The beauty and effectiveness of democracy should never be underestimated. The power of people given the ability to rule themselves should not be taken for granted. Democracy is intelligent action that knows the power of opposing views even when it despises the opposing view.

Democracy is always trying to evolve and get to a better place. The fact that the vast majority of people see this in terms of their own economic progress it does make sense that a few step away and see it in a different way.

I felt that if democracy is not a "way of life" then it is superfluous. The fact that millionaires run politics says to the casual person, "you are irrelevant if you aren't a millionaire, don't even try to run for office. Participate only through your vote and your innocuous special interest groups. It doesn't matter if you are angry at the fact or if the fact alienates you to the breaking point. You are irrelevant."

The casual citizen finally devolves to the point of view of, "well, if it doesn't bother the people, why should it bother me? They are the ones who will suffer the consequences."



In the race between cash and ideas, cash will trump mere ideas every time unless you get superb leadership. It's not an automatic process. The populist movement that gains the momentum of truth is the most powerful force in a democracy since the populism, to be successful, must cross many boundaries of the pluralistic culture. For a brief moment idea overcomes cash.

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The tension in a democracy is between the powerful incentive of people to "be all that they can be," and the creation out of them of a powerful state necessary to maintain so that they may be all that they can be.

What real boundary exists in the democracy? Law is the ultimate boundary and people test it all the time. But as far as development I don't see many except for the fact that we are constrained by time and space. We are constrained by ignorance. And most especially we are constrained by fear. So that a free person would do everything in his or her power to overcome those constraints and live along some new horizon.

The skeptical view, even an honest skepticism, can do away with just about anything. It can deny the existence of the physical universe. But it cannot reproduce anything of the rich, profound experiences it tries to eradicate. The dangerous trend is the way people surrender to the inhuman to protect them from a state of powerlessness. But even a small, innocuous inhumanity can addict the person to something vastly inhuman that destroys the sense of individuality without which the democracy is superfluous.

The perfect situation is "a perfect integrity removed from total, collective neurosis."

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The problem I see in American politics is that it is not very distinctive. It is becoming something you constantly see in history; a thing people eventually rebelled against. If that is the case and American democracy is lost in history it will be saved by a few poets and scholars who saw, at some point, the true uniqueness and credit America with things we can hardly speak to today or credit today. "Its success, its hugeness and complexity, its complacency in the people and the arrogance of the leaders, its separation, each generation, each decade from the original point of its development, huge changes in

the world all conspired to bring it down. It was, in truth, an oligarchy that had to prove itself to sleepy, distracted people from time to time."

I hope not.

The key in reading a democracy is to look at the people. Are they listless? Are they excited and passionate yet experienced? Are they taking up the cause of democracy which is to produce better and better men and women? Or, are they so exhausted by things that they need violence in their lives and are angry and frustrated at their lives? Are they connected to the organizing principle?

It's an open ended question. True democracy is hard work and takes a large wedge of energy from people for it to be effective.

March 12, 2015

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No one likes government. Two original framers, Madison and Jefferson, didn't like government. Jefferson hated it and Madison was only into it when he could act as Plato and help create a new system based on his abstract thinking on power and effective justice. Jefferson purely hated government, had a painful public life I believe and is the root source for most of the natural, instinctive distrust of government that the people have.

One excellent benefit from such an idea is that the burden of responsibility for carrying the idea of freedom and liberty goes to the private citizen. From the private citizen allegiance goes out to invest a "thing" with power. The government is the act of disestablishing a terrible burden on the people so that they may live and thrive. But all acts have consequence. "He who will take your burden away will also come later to claim his reward." And it's quite easy to see how a guy or group of people in power would see their positions as something other than the simple act of "relieving the people of some of their burdens."

It sets up a lot of easy corruption.

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The only people who love government are those who are in love with its easy access to capital and law. They want it for themselves and compete with other types who “love” government to see who will possess it.

It does present a dilemma does it not? I don’t love government but I don’t want to dismantle it either.

It’s good government that is the transient prize for a generation of citizens.

Know it as an original meaning

Suffer through the humiliation of its corruption

Get some reasonable understanding of the difference between good and bad government.

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Shouldn’t our “hatred” of government make us bigger, smarter, wiser, and more profoundly attached to the ground of our freedom and liberty? Where’s the proof of that??

Every time someone tries to define America it eludes them. It is not something you define; it is something that plays through and the few objects and words you capture make all the difference in the world. The ways of trying to define the American in my lifetime have all come to grief. They couldn’t hold an ounce of her tonnage. They wanted her riches without the sacrifice. They pass on behind her like an inelegant passing of gas when the drunk people don’t seem to care one way or the other.

Yet, the old beast is wrong often enough.

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On seeing our great cities the founders would have said, “do you use the leverages correctly? Is good produced out of the necessity of having cities like this?”

They would have been dismayed by the types that had formed the political organization early on and which the increase in the city simply amplified. In fact, made realer than real and so grew from those

seeds familiar and unfamiliar roots and limbs. The educated types taught how to manipulate the people and their beliefs. The pure thugs among them killed with impunity. Deals were always expected. The very idea of a democratic man or woman became something of an inside joke.

I don't think they would have been shocked how Europe and America reversed the polarity so to speak. But I think they'd be very concerned about our power and how that secures a better liberal democracy. I don't think they would have resisted the varieties of expansion the U.S. initiated since 1800.

But they would certainly try to find the key to whether "what they set up" has any meaning left in itself, if it is "relevant," and how, exactly, do you justify a huge nation state with principles of democracy? Every step is a treacherous one. And if "democracy" has failed then what do we have?

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America is too pessimistic when things are bad and too complacent and blasé when things are good. And as in unhappy families the good and bad tend to individual cases. A man in poverty who gets a winning lottery ticket is going to feel a lot more optimistic than a rich man whose portfolio takes a dive whatever the macro environment may be.

America is an idea. It is not a tradition. It is an idea renewed each generation that men and women can rule themselves and can, by ruling themselves, get the full benefit of potential from the myriad communities that make up the whole. It requires, then, a fully developed citizen, non-alienable from his or her potential, a belief in the future, the resources to fend off bad times and prepare for good ones, the intelligent perception of the needs of the citizens, and as short a line from the citizen to those who have temporary power.

The idea begins to break down when ancient conflicts rise up; when the citizen is defined by the nature of class they inhabit by birth, or when old persistent irrationalities make their way into the public culture.

The question to ask if you are pessimistic is, "are they shooting at each other?" No? Then there are pessimisms worse than we know that we have somehow survived. Time likes different cubicles to nest in and out of.

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Time and Money are natural enemies for a while.

Money manipulates life, Time transforms it.

The manipulations can be very pleasant. We love to surrender to a few of the pleasing manipulations of the day.

January 26, 2015