

The United State of Denial

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Given all that we now know, how is it Bush maintains his position in the electoral standings?

In a recent interview, Bill Clinton suggested an answer: "When the electorate THINKS, Democrats win!" How about progressives? The essential issue is how, in a climate of fostered, managed fear, hysteria and anxiety, to engage and sustain those voters' thinking processes that intense emotions -- joy, hate, fear or passion -- effectively interdict? Intense emotions, the Publicans are masters at provoking if nothing else! It appears that much of the American electorate is presently INCapable of thinking rationally, on home or foreign issues, so terrorized have they been, not by foreign operatives but by our present government -- incapable of recognizing, much less admitting, the frightful succession of errors our government has made; unwilling to consider the possibility that over 1000 of our youth and in excess of 16,000 Iraqi civilians have been killed for a monstrous mistake. The consequences of that reflection are too painful to bear. About the most serious issues facing us, foreign or domestic, many Americans are seeming in chronic denial. Why?

Over and over again our politicians repeat the same mind-numbing refrain: we're good, we're wonderful, we're above and beyond reproach; any who opposes us is evil; we have the right and moral obligation to impose our way and will on any others, although what we really want is consumers on which to unload the worthless, needless excesses our economy churns out. What, I wonder, would the world's mean standard of living be were we to devote our energies and resources to making and distributing things that others really need instead of things for which we must create demand? Too many Americans don't get it. We're told we're safer than we were three years ago, but we've been making enemies faster than we can kill them. We're told we're winning the war on terrorism, but we've made Iraq and Afghanistan the recruiting posters for terrorist organizations. We're told the economy is improving but jobs have been lost left, right and center, to be replaced when they are, with menial work. We're told we can't afford Medicare, Social Security, universal health care, a sustainable environment or an effective educational system, but we squander billions on vain attempts to change the rest of the world with no-bid contracts for our corporate juggernauts then we reward the ridiculously rich with tax cuts. And we fail to consider or even sense how differently, from how we see ourselves, we are perceived worldwide. Our infallible righteousness is not widely appreciated abroad. On the contrary, we are increasingly viewed with suspicion or outright distaste; yet America steams on, oblivious. To informed, objective observers, we seem pathologically delusional.

For some, religion is part of their denial system. If god be for us, who can stand against us? And if George W. truly has a hotline to heaven, is

it not sacrilegious to question god's personal emissary? Recently a soldier heading back to Iraq was asked, "By choice?" "I have no choice!", he responded. "Certainly you do! Just none that is pleasant!" The soldier's wife chimed in, "He's protecting our freedoms!"

Nonsense, he's protecting our corporations' 'right' to interfere in any country's affairs that suits their corporate interests and profit lines; he is doing our government's dirty work at their bidding, but that has NOTHING to do with our 'freedoms' unless you mean the freedom to abuse other peoples when it suits us! He just doesn't get it.

This country is composed of individuals. The government, particularly not an unelected government, is NOT to be confused with the country; nor is the country the business interests such a government is beholden to! If you sign up to be a goon, muscle for the corporate bosses, that's a choice you make; but it is 'patriotism' only in the narrowest of senses. If you want to make this country a more civil member the world community, not its emperor, that's also a choice you can act on, should you have the courage to do so.

Reports in the last few weeks have alleged that the 'war' in Iraq is essentially lost. Whatever we may have sought to accomplish -- a coherent, cohesive nation; some semblance of a legitimate, effective government 'friendly' to our national interests; a self-reliant nation capable of standing on its own two feet -- is essentially now unobtainable. Yet our government soldiers on for an acquiescent citizenry.

Having destroyed Iraq and Afghanistan, (we) owe each country much: an apology, restitution and incidentally a commitment to the world community to cease and desist our wantonly destructive, aggressive behavior? But the job and funds for such restitution should never, ever be entrusted to the very corporations that led us into this mess in the first place. Rather it should be in the hands of the United Nations or non-governmental, non-profit organizations. Why isn't it? The Iraqi resistance to our occupation have made it clear: they will quit when we leave. Our 'leadership' calls them thugs, bandits, and outsiders; but American reporters on the scene say they are principally Iraqi nationals, doing what we would, were we occupied by a foreign invader: trying to protect homes and families by expelling the alien invaders. We had no business going in there in the first place; we can put a stop to the daily slaughter just by admitting what a royal cockup we've made of it and truly hand it over to the Iraqis themselves to sort out, with our deepest, most sincere contrition. But that sounds too much like the behavior of a mature adult who has wronged another. Our leadership just doesn't get it and we go along with their rationales. Why is less expected of nations than of their individual citizens? In his 'Dispatches' from Vietnam three decades ago, Michael Herr cited the ironic query: "What's the difference between the Marines and the Boy Scouts? One has adult leadership!"

Where is our country's adult leadership in this time of crisis? Where is this generation's young John Kerry to ask, "Who will be the last (wo)man to be die (or even to be injured or maimed) for a mistake?" Who has the

maturity and compassion truly to support our troops, by NOT supporting the damnable politicians who put them there in the first place?

First, it has to be acknowledged that hundreds of our own and tens of thousands of Iraqis have been slaughtered for at worst, lies, at best, grossly misstated misinformation; then appropriate remedial action must be taken, not more fuel poured on the fire of an ill-conceived, mismanaged foreign policy.

Domestically, educational, environmental, socially constructive programs, the core of our common commitment to our future, the young, the elderly and the infirm, are being left un- or under-funded. Entitlement programs, Social Security and Medicare, are collapsing. Perhaps, just perhaps, we might once have been able to afford them with the now squandered surpluses; no longer, it is claimed. Why had America billions to throw ineffectually at Iraq while neither Social Security nor Medicare come up to the minimum standards of living or care for many elders? Isn't the problem with Medicare not just the loss of reserve funds but also the COST of health care, the utter lack of restraint on the costs laid off on the public by the health care sector, both the drug companies and the medical profession? Our 'leadership' doesn't want to take issue with the medical community's out-of-control pricing, so as usual the well-to-do are enriched at the expense of the needy.

Similarly, outsourcing and loss of jobs to foreign workforces is a problem that will not go away. Internationally there are too many social goods arising from the lifting of vast numbers, for example of Chinese and Indians, out of poverty over the last decade. The problem to be addressed in this country is not preventing the loss of jobs; they will go, willy-nilly. It is preventing our predatory industries from benefitting from those losses at the expense of their present or former employees. There is supposed to be an 'adjustment assistance' program to train laid-off, outsourced workers for more durable professions. Are those programs being funded? Why not? Meanwhile corporations, their executives and investors, reap windfall profits from the reduction in labor costs. Again, unconscionably, one sector of the economy profits at the expense of another.

Perhaps Kerry's tax on companies that out source might alleviate some of this economic misery were those tax revenues specifically directed to the victims of outsourcing. Is that the plan? What about new, durable jobs for the next generation of American youngsters now graduating their schooling and entering the workforce? How can our corporate sector be induced to create secure, sustainable jobs for them? What would it take? Where is that mature public leadership when we need it? When will the victims of the leadership vacuum think and react effectively or better act proactively?

Panicked Americans want desperately to hear that all is well, regardless whether it is or not. We crave quick, cheap fixes, now. We subsist on an orgy of distractions - loud, mind-numbing spectacles, violent spectator sports, trash tv, fantasy and soap-operatic melodramas and inane, idiot commercials - to distance ourselves from the realities that desperately need dealing with and the jobs that demand doing. On a recent Now segment

for PBS, Kathleen Jamison observed that the problems facing this country are so daunting, so intractable, admitting only of such unpalatable solutions, that aspiring politicians dare not address them directly, publicly. To do so would risk defeat by a disappointed, disillusioned electorate. Ask Nader; ask Dean, Sharpton, or Kucinich. So political survivors underwrite and subscribe to cycles of prevailing mythologies: we are good, they are evil; war will bring peace; better a tyrannical stability than the chaos of free and open societies, at least for them, not for us; strength comes from military might, not consensus; democracy is more effectively imposed than nurtured; security trumps civil rights; fear supersedes reason; hit first and ask questions later; others don't like our imposing our will upon them, but someday they will surely thank us. Blinded by the fog, not of war but, of national self-delusion, is not our national pursuit of myth and fantasy in lieu of demonstrated economic, historical and societal realities the very definition of a country in political, economic, social denial? Problems ignored, unidentified, unacknowledged and unaddressed cannot, will not, be solved.

How do we re-invoke the habit of rational thought in the United State of Denial?

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