



THE AMERICAN SPECTATOR

SUMMER 2021

Edited by R. Emmett Tyrrell, Jr.



THE BIDEN ECONOMY

Welcome Back, Carter

Joel Kotkin v. James Howard Kunstler on the Housing Crunch

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Summer 2021

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EDITOR'S NOTE

Joe Biden: A Meditation

by Wlady Pleszczynski

Maybe in selecting Joe Biden as his running mate, Barack Obama was just setting us up. Think back to the glory of 2008. Did Obama ever once display serious respect for the clownish, graying, and malapropish senator from the great state of Scranton? (I remember when he once referred to us as the “American Specter.”) Given all the anti-Western signals the supremely cocky Obama liked to send out, it was as if his choice of Joe was intended to speed the demise of Average Joe America, sort of the way TV commercials were already doing in their depictions of hapless white male shlubs. Joe was Obama’s useful idiot.

In his eight years as veep, Joe gave us no reason to think otherwise, except maybe during his vice-presidential debate in 2012 with Paul Ryan, who had his breakfast, lunch, and dinner handed to him. The doofus sure had a mean streak.

Conservatives failed to pay attention. They just assumed Ryan was fighting with one if not both hands tied behind his back by the strange man on whose ticket he was serving. Or maybe eight years later they just plumb forgot that Joe is above all a political bully who pretends he likes to smile and play the tough guy when boasting of his anti-Trump credentials.

Next thing you know conservatives were misestimating him (sorry, Dubya), reassuring themselves throughout the lockdown campaign of 2020 that they were up against a senile, demented wreck of a man. So that essentially has been their policy, waiting for the oldest president in our history to keel over.

But neither life nor politics is that simple. Joe, never the brightest bulb in the room, doesn’t need all that many IQ points to function. As long as his eyes can read from a teleprompter, he can cover the basics, even deliver the equivalent of a State of the Union speech. It is amazing what a feral nature can accomplish, particularly in a media climate that always gives him a free pass — and, at this point, blind adoration. Late in his political career, a mediocre pol has become an untouchable.

Joe understands the deal. He does what his greedy party demands. Thus he equates conservatives and Republicans with terrorists, Jim Crow supporters, and white supremacists, for starters, and serves as the front man in an unprecedented effort to effect a total remake of America’s economy and inflate our trillion-dollar deficits into the quadrillions. The immediate



Wlady Pleszczynski is executive editor of The American Spectator.



and not just ultimate goal is to secure one-party rule, all in the name of democracy and destroying the threats an opposition party poses to it. Opposition to *anything* Democrats propose is now by definition a threat to democracy.

How did we become a land of Leninists, led by this excuse of a president? My mind goes back to the moment when Biden, two years after the Obama presidency, openly bragged to a Council of Foreign Relations audience about the delight he took in forcing the Ukrainian government to fire a prosecutor looking into the operations of a big-time Ukrainian energy company — the same company, we later learned, that had signed Biden’s son to an utterly corrupt deal.

This entire episode, and there are many like it, has in no way been disqualifying. To the contrary. That’s when you know that corruption has taken the upper hand: politically, intellectually, culturally, institutionally. I do not know how we get out of it, only that Joe Biden is a hero of his times.

Wouldn’t you know it — after all these years he is the one we’ve been waiting for. 🐸



Sandcastles

Democrats are gleefully destroying a nation that took generations to build.

by **Melissa Mackenzie**

It's summer! Time to go to the beach, get a tan, and build a sandcastle. Building a sandcastle is no easy feat. There needs to be a steady supply of wet sand, which means there needs to be water. Our family digs a "lake" so that we still have water when the surf rolls out. And then there's the planning and building. Building a sandcastle is not easy. A good one takes all day to complete.

But destroying a sandcastle? That's easy. All it takes is an incoming tide or a vindictive toddler, and all that hard work is gone in an instant.

The United States and nearly every leftist state is governed by vindictive toddlers who enable other vindictive toddlers to destroy everything small business owners and taxpayers have built. They've destroyed the economy, the incentive to work, and whole neighborhoods. National Democrats are attempting to destroy Middle East peace (and succeeding!), the military, and American hegemony. They're destroying the dollar and creating inflation — a tax on the poor.

It takes time to build civilization. It's something that happens brick by brick, family by family, business by business. It happens one sacrifice and risk at a time. It takes law and order, peace, resources, a coherent culture, and trust in institutions. Civilization, especially Western civilization, is an intricate and complex thing that has taken centuries to build.

What took generations to build is taking only years, sometimes mere days, to destroy. It's astonishing how quickly and effectively the Democrats are tearing down our country.

In this slim issue, we're focusing on the economic ramifications of their kicking at our sandcastle. Democrats have turned the cities they run into crime-ridden dens of iniquity. Citizens in states run by Democrats face higher unemployment, higher taxes, and higher COVID-19 death rates. People are moving in droves to escape this misery. Democrats encouraged the destruction of the raving Marxists of Black Lives Matter and Antifa, and now they've gutted their cities. Thanks to Biden's state bailout, Democrat states are flush with cash but losing tax-paying citizens.



Melissa Mackenzie is publisher of The American Spectator.



What are the consequences of sending checks directly to Americans? What are the consequences of inflation? What are the consequences of flooding America with cheap, imported labor? What are the consequences of bringing the U.S. economy to a screeching halt and then attempting to start it up again?

People can't buy homes. Businesses can't get needed parts. Employers can't find employees. There is a confluence of economic psychoses, and now President Biden and the utterly irresponsible Democrats want to flood the U.S. economy with \$6 trillion of funny money after already inundating it with increasingly worthless dollars. What does the future hold for Americans if the government stays on this profligate track?

In these pages, we have economists and tax policy experts and housing pros discussing the ramifications of Democrat policy. There are opposing opinions — in line with the old joke that if you put ten economists in a room, you'll get eleven opinions. Forecasting what will happen during such transformative times is challenging. Still, it's worth exploring what's happening and what the conservative response to these challenges should be.

Economic reality can drive cultural reality. We're seeing this with the direct payments to Americans. Why work when one makes more money when one *doesn't* work? And it's not like all this idle time is being spent productively. Crime is soaring. That's partly due

to Democrat leaders being lax about penalizing criminals. It's also because crime pays. Why buy something when one can steal it?

Economic reality can change foreign-policy reality. We're seeing this play out, too. An economically weak America, reliant (again!) on foreign oil, strengthens enemies like Russia, Iran, and China. China's long-term investment in the Biden family seems to be paying off. The State Department calls off investigations, and American manufacturing and medicine is crippled without tech and chemicals from China. The Biden administration talks a good game, but its policies harm the interests of Americans and free people around the world.

Should Americans worry about an ascending China? China may be America's biggest competitor, but the country has challenges of its own, both culturally and economically. That might not matter, though, if America is weak enough.

The post-COVID, Democrat-run world isn't all bad, though: many booze regulations loosened during the pandemic are being made permanent.

We're also trying something new in this issue. A young game designer has created a Sudoku for us to try to solve. Please let me know what you think of it.

America is a resilient nation. She weathers natural disasters. She is charitable. She innovates and creates. It remains an open question whether or not she can endure the man-made Democrat shutdown disaster and the misguided attempts at recovery. ✎

What took generations to build is taking only years, sometimes mere days, to destroy.



Reagan, Carter, and Cash

From the November 1980 issue of The American Spectator.

by R. Emmett Tyrrell, Jr.

In the fall of 1980, Ronald Reagan demonstrated what will save us from Jimmy Carter's deathly economics. We need to be ready to act similarly for when we can escape the clutches of reckless Bidenomics.

On September 9, in Chicago — “the city that works,” as local boomers still proudly affirm — Ronald Reagan unveiled his economic program, a program for citizens who work or at least who want to work. One must keep in mind that working is not so feasible today as it was in days of yore. Seven and six-tenths of the Republic's workers, becalmed in this Age of the Common Carter, cannot get jobs.

Under our president's roof there are counselors who advise that this is to be expected, for the Eighties is to be a decade of limits, to which we shall simply have to habituate ourselves. Reagan is out of sympathy with this Malthusian perspective. He calls his program a “strategy for growth.” One does not want to make too weighty a point of this disagreement, but Reagan's program does seem to place him more in the tradition of FDR, HST, and JFK than the policy of lowered expectations over which the present administration purrs.

At any rate, one of the reasons that 7.6 percent of our citizens spend their days with idle hands is that the so-called liberals have in their wisdom set up various impediments against economic activity; that is to say, against the creation of jobs. Some

of those impediments are government regulations to keep us saintly and healthy and down. Some of those impediments are laws like the minimum wage law that eliminates low-paying jobs — the only jobs some newcomers to the job market are capable of — thus creating unemployment and all the social evils that come with it.

Yet the most onerous impediment against economic activity is taxation. Heavy taxes discourage people from working and creating wealth. They discourage businesses from expanding. They force labor leaders to demand tax-free fringe benefits for their rank and file rather than wage increases.

Even though he came into office roaring that our tax system was “a disgrace to the human race,” the tax burden has risen wondrously during the reign of the smartest young man ever to graduate from the Plains, Georgia, high school. So has unemployment. So has inflation. Hockey fans might call this the presidential hat trick. It is an unusual achievement. No other president has accomplished it in this century. Not even Herbert Hoover.

In 1976, the federal tax gouge amounted to 19.5 percent of our gross national product. In 1979, it reached 21 percent, and under present law it is estimated that federal taxes will inhale 24.7 percent of our GNP in fiscal 1985.

To all these robust tax increases Ronald Reagan now proclaims that he would do

cruel violence. In his economic program he declares, rather eloquently I would say, that “more than any single thing, high rates of taxation destroy incentive to earn, to save, to invest. They cripple productivity, lead to deficit financing and inflation and create unemployment.” His prescription is to cut taxes 10 percent per year for three years, and he wants to reduce business taxes through faster depreciation. After these three years he wants to index taxation so that if the crafty pols on Capitol Hill continue to inflate our economy, they will not be getting away with ever-larger hunks of the ever-larger paychecks we are forced to earn just to keep up with our past standard of living.

Our president is a very smart fellow — or a quick study, as the cognoscenti of Washington say — and even before Reagan delivered his speech the Wonderboy served up his judgment of the GOP tax-cut plan. Jimmy adjudged it a “very, very serious mistake.” Well, when it comes to making mistakes with economic programs, the Wonderboy ought to know. He has, over a period of eight months, fashioned three

different programs — all of them attempts to duplicate such New Testament feats as the Miracle of the Loaves and Fishes and the Wedding Feast at Cana, where water was turned into wine. The Wonderboy's last economic program was announced on August 28. He called it an “economic program for the '80s,” and a glance at its policies suggests that it is not the decade of the Eighties but the age group that the Carter administration has in mind. Apparently the administration senses that most of us were octogenarians, all bedridden and senile. Carter will keep us in our beds. His program would turn America into the largest poverty hospital ever heard of. He sees America as one vast geriatric ward.

Placed side by side, the economic programs of Ronald Reagan and Jimmy Carter reveal antipodal views of mankind. Reagan is the optimist. Carter is the pessimist. Reagan sees us as capable. Carter sees us as inept and wobbling for Skid Row were it not for the government's watchful eye. Reagan wants to free us to improve our condition. He believes we can do it, and he

is unafraid of the outcome. Carter is not so sure we can do much more than pollute our environment, cheat one another, and line up for welfare. He stands with Kennedy and views the citizens' income as government property to be returned to us only for socially useful purposes.

In sum, Reagan sees the American people as a source of energy. He wants to use it. Carter wants to conserve it for pumping rocking chairs on the front porch, for roosting before the boob tube, and for other such dynamic purposes. Lewis Lehrman has described the difference between Reagan's economics and Carter's as the difference between Prometheus and Malthus. Prometheus stole fire from the heavens and championed man against the gods. Malthus scowled, shook his old head, and figured that the human race would run off the edge of the Earth instantaneously were it not for crime, disease, war, and vice. He was, naturally enough, opposed to the only one of these pastimes that is any fun. ❧



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R. Emmett Tyrrell, Jr. is founder and editor-in-chief of The American Spectator.



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WELCOME BACK, CARTER



It's *That '70s Show* ... Again

Biden revives a lost decade with the same old policies — and the same old results.

by **Scott McKay**

In some ways, the 1970s wasn't the worst decade in recent American history. The music was pretty good. Between Lynyrd Skynyrd, Led Zeppelin, the Allman Brothers, Eric Clapton, and some of the other rock greats who made their mark in the 1970s, the decade's soundtrack was actually pretty solid.

At least until disco came along.

That was a pretty good metaphor for the whole thing, actually. The 1970s was a decade spent waiting around for things to either implode or get better.

Our foreign policy certainly imploded with the Iran hostage crisis, and of course from Henry Kissinger to Jimmy Carter, the post-Vietnam stance of "détente" with the Soviet Union was essentially an exercise in waiting around to lose the Cold War.

In the 1970s, folks waited around plenty — and not just to get tickets to the *Star Wars* premiere. Gas lines were a thing, and not a good thing. In the 1970s, there was a lot of talk about "peak oil," because at the time it was thought that America had mostly tapped out of its oil supply and the rest of the world would eventually follow suit.

It's funny how things that are accepted by all the smart people tend to be so wrong.

Just ask Joe Biden, our back-to-the-1970s president, who's been wrong about almost everything since he got himself elected to the Senate in 1972.

Biden's first major vote was to oppose the construction of the Trans-Alaska Pipeline, which was a curious stance to take given that his opposition came amid the 1973 Arab oil embargo.

The parallels and ironies of that set of facts alone will make you peruse your vinyl collection in search of some theme music for Biden's retrograde politics. ELO is a bit too upbeat; Engelbert Humperdinck might be just right.

That's because Biden's opposition to oil pipelines — and in fact his near-comic bumbling on that issue — is like a bad acid trip for the domestic energy industry.

Just as he opposed the Trans-Alaska Pipeline decades ago, he opposed Keystone XL in this one. This time Biden actually shut that pipeline down, which infuriated our Canadian allies and, together with a number of other moronic decisions, sent the price of oil and gasoline skyrocketing.

But then Biden dropped the U.S. government's opposition to Russia's Nord Stream pipeline, which all but gave the European energy economy over to the Russians. That



A regular contributor to The American Spectator, Scott McKay is the publisher of The Hayride, a politics and culture website based in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. He has also written three novels and is the proprietor of The Speakeasy, a new free-speech social media platform.

happened only a couple of weeks or so after a Russian hacking club had shut down our Colonial pipeline, which supplies some 45 percent of the motor fuel in the eastern United States.

And a ransom was paid to the Russians to reopen it, which reminds one of the Iranian hostage crisis.

Biden's administration has taken almost no time to recreate the 1970s in other ways, namely juicing inflation to levels not seen since the aftermath of the Carter administration. Inflation isn't measured like it formerly was, with a lot of the most volatile prices no longer factoring into the Consumer Price Index (CPI). But in April the CPI still showed a whopping increase of more than 4 percent, and commodities like lumber, corn, and copper are through the roof.

Here's one difference from the 1970s: back then the liberals who ran the country simply didn't know what they were doing. That's true of Biden now, but his handlers do know. They don't believe in peak oil, but they're trying to create it by shutting down exploration and drilling. They're also working to create shortages of virtually everything as part of the idiotic Green New Deal agenda the Democrat Party has embraced.

The Black Panthers are also back, though they never really went away. But this time the strident racial Marxism of the Huey Newton

set is ensconced in an academic discipline of sorts called critical race theory, which has the full faith and credit of the federal government pushing it from grad school to grade school. And the new gang in the streets with raised fists calls itself Black Lives Matter, though what comes out of the mouths of some of its most vocal proponents sounds almost like George Wallace.

A lot of the worst things about the 1970s are back with a vengeance. That same year Biden voted against the Alaska pipeline, 1973, saw Israel under attack in the Yom Kippur War, a dicey affair that ended inconclusively. Israel just recently came under attack by Hamas, which launched rockets from Gaza and used children as human shields to hide behind. Both in 1973 and today, the Israelis are feeling left quite a bit alone by their supposed American allies. Then it was our dependence on Arab oil that explained our tepid support; now it's Biden's dependence on efforts to get in bed with the Iranians for some strange reason.

And just like back in the 1970s, there's a "reopening" of relations with China. When Richard Nixon first broke bread with the Chinese communists, it was seen as a master stroke in international relations, sawing China off from an alliance with the Soviets. But today's thawing of relations with the ChiComs is a little less sensible given

that the world is waking up to the fact that the Chinese gave us the Wuhan virus as an opening gambit.

In the 1970s, there was hope that an opening to China would bring about freedom and prosperity there. Now? We're beginning to find a national consensus in favor of closing that door before we lose all our freedom and prosperity to Chinese dominance.

It was in the 1970s that we stopped recognizing Taiwan as a sovereign nation, though we continued treating it as one. Pretty soon there won't be a Taiwan to recognize the way things are going.

We've gone from Billy Carter to Hunter Biden, and that's not a good trade. Nor is going from Barbara Jordan to Sheila Jackson Lee. LeBron James has found a way to be more subversive than Kareem Abdul-Jabbar without changing his name, and watching New York go bankrupt again isn't a fun experience. Nor is recognizing that the 1970s wants its murder rate back.

The *Rocky Horror Picture Show* first appeared on movie screens in 1975. There aren't too many movie screens in use right now, but you can find Dr. Frank N. Furter, or something resembling Tim Curry's intentionally awful character, at pretty much any local library during Drag Queen Story Hour. Other manifestations of that movie can currently be found on reality TV.

And Planned Parenthood went from cranking up the post-*Roe v. Wade* abortion machine in the 1970s to now ramping up delivery of sex-change hormones to kids. That reprise of Planned Parenthood's business model expansion isn't overly welcome, either.

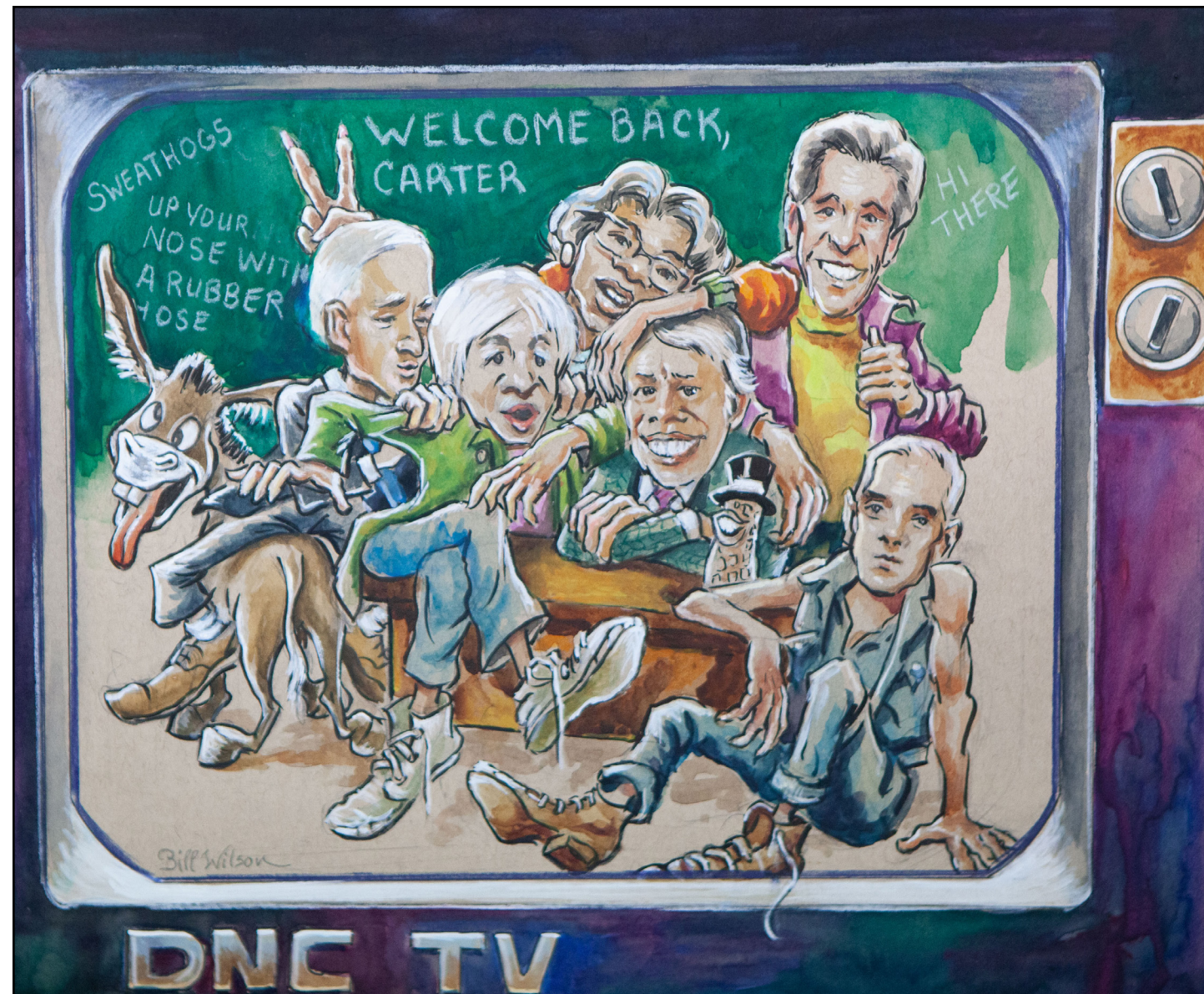
But we've at least managed to trade bell bottoms for skinny jeans. Whether or not that's a step up probably depends on the wearer.

The Weathermen are now Antifa, with a similar sluggishness on the part of law enforcement to do anything about their mayhem. Jim Jones's sermons are now regurgitated on college campuses and video blogs by the Squad; everybody's drinking the Kool-Aid, and the same leftist San Francisco politicians who patronized and propped up Jones are still around, more powerful than ever.

At least *The Andromeda Strain* was just a movie. It seemed more realistic than the response to COVID-19 has been.

The good news is that the 1970s begat the 1980s, as after a decade of mostly awful culture and thoroughly awful politics America was desperate for a Ronald Reagan to lead a renaissance.

Perhaps 2024 will be 1980. That would be fine. We'll need it after weathering this '70s show Biden is putting on.



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BY SCOTT MCKAY

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Democrats' Third Wave: Victory or Death

If they don't act now, they may not have another chance to enact their agenda for decades to come.

by Grover Norquist

What is the modern Democrat Party doing? And why? The Democrat leadership understands that unless they change the rules for the economy and elections, their party will not just lose control of Congress in 2022 as they did with Clinton in 1994 and Obama in 2010. No, they'll lose their grip on American politics entirely.

Democrats face a long-term decline in the structures and funding that make theirs a competitive party. Without massive new spending and programs, the party will decline in size, strength, and funding to the point where it will cease to be a serious competitor for national power. Without dramatic changes in America's laws, it is the Democratic Party, not the Republican Party, that is on the path to oblivion.

So here's their plan.

Spending Everything

Democrats are planning three massive spending bills, each roughly \$2 trillion, over the next ten years.

Biden's first annual budget would spend an unprecedented \$6 trillion, about 25.6 percent of America's economic output, a cost not imposed on Americans since World War II. The goal is to make this scale of spending the new normal.

Taxing Everything

Democrats are threatening \$3.6 trillion in higher taxes.

They aim to increase the capital gains tax to 40.8 percent, twice China's and the highest since Jimmy Carter in 1977.

They would also hike the federal corporate income tax from 21 percent to 28 percent. Given that the average state and local corporate income tax is roughly 6 percent (and fully deductible from federal income taxes), most businesses will be hit with a marginal combined corporate tax of 33 percent, ten points above the European average of 23.5 percent and eight points higher than communist China.

Biden plans to take away the "step up in basis," a hundred-year-old feature of the U.S. tax code designed to protect family farms and small businesses from being crushed by taxes at the end of each generation. Today, as for the past hundred years, when parents died, the children would assume the farm/business with a cost basis at the time of death. They would *not* pay capital gains taxes on the increased value (greatly augmented by inflation) of the family business during their parents' lifetime.

Biden would remove this long-standing protection and force every generation to pay capital gains (now 40 percent rather than 23.8 percent). How is the family business to pay such taxes? Go into debt? Sell the farm?



Grover Norquist is president of *Americans for Tax Reform*.

The Democrats actually repealed the "step up in basis" in 1976. It was so unworkable it was never implemented and was formally repealed in 1980 by President Carter and a Democrat Congress.

Biden plans to hire eighty-seven thousand more IRS agents as part of an \$80 billion gift to the agency in order to squeeze more money from taxpayers. Biden promises that spending \$80 billion on the IRS will drag in an additional \$787 billion in tax dollars over ten years. Previous budgets have given less optimistic estimates of how much an additional IRS agent can bring in. They have always fallen short.

Are there billions in unpaid taxes to be collected? This assertion is the magic wand repeatedly waved by Democrats to justify more spending on IRS agents. The projected revenues from more "enforcement" never materialize.

Taxing Guns

Biden supports a "poll tax," not on the right to cast a ballot but on the right to keep and bear arms in the Second Amendment. Think about that for a minute — a tax on a constitutional right. During his presidential campaign, Biden promised to impose a \$200 federal tax on owning a semi-automatic firearm and another \$200 for magazines holding more than ten rounds.

Was he serious? The question was answered when he appointed gun control fanatic David Chipman to be the director of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives. Chipman, like Biden during his campaign, supports a \$200 tax on all "assault weapons" — a meaningless term of art as malleable as "infrastructure" that, Chipman claims, includes the eighteen million AR-15s and even .22-caliber rifles in some cases. This is *not* a tax on machine guns but on regular hunting rifles. Oh, and when you pay the fee/tax you have to send in your fingerprints, photo, and a multi-page questionnaire that asks for your address and your "reason" for owning the gun.

Or you can sell your gun to the government and avoid the tax. Voila — one constitutional right taxed away.

So this is the Democrats' plan: a dramatic increase in government spending from the average of the last ten years of 21.2 percent to 24.5 percent of the nation's income, a hike in taxes on investment and business income on individuals and businesses, and gun control.

Why? Did the Democrats not notice that Bill Clinton ran this play in 1993 and 1994 and the Democrats lost fifty-two seats in the House and eight seats in the Senate? The Republicans won majorities in the House and Senate from 1994 to 2006 — the next twelve years.

Those with weaker memories might at least harken back to 2008–10, when Obama did exactly the same tax-and-spend two-step and in 2010 lost the House by giving up sixty-three seats, along with forfeiting six Senate seats.

But it turns out that progressive Democrats *have* noticed those two recent history lessons. That is precisely why Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and others take one look at the narrow Democrat majority in the House — 219-211 with five seats open as of this writing — and the fifty-fifty tie in the Senate and say, "Let's get as much toothpaste out of the tube as possible now, however messy, because we *will* lose control of Congress in 2022."

And, with the new census showing the country's population shifting to red states and previous Democrat gerrymanders in Florida, North Carolina, and Arizona likely to be undone in 2022, the Democrats will, as the Daily Kos predicted, be locked out of the House for a decade. Read my lips: no new taxes, no new spending. For ten years. Therefore: smash and grab.

As a prophylactic, the Democrats are creating what they hope will be a new collection of dependent classes that will allow them

to buy enough "dependency votes" to push through 2022. Each of the three spending bills is designed to create more government employees whose gold-plated salaries and promised pensions will encourage them to vote and vote their self-interest as tax-eaters, not taxpayers.

At every turn the spending is designed to create only unionized jobs and/or government jobs. The tax hikes are designed to reduce private-sector jobs and wages and eliminate most independent contractors and small businessmen, who generally view their income as created by their own hard work and therefore, unfortunately for them, tend to vote Republican.

The above can arguably be done by executive order or through a reconciliation package that requires a simple majority in the House and fifty votes in the Senate plus the vice president's tie-breaking vote.

But should West Virginia Sen. Joe Manchin and (not or) Arizona's Kyrsten Sinema vote to alter or abolish the filibuster, then the agenda moves to permanently changing the rules to lock in a Democrat majority in both Houses of Congress that will be immune to challenge.

Rewriting Labor Law

Democrats in the House and Senate have demonstrated almost unanimous support for the PRO Act, a radical rewriting of U.S. labor law that begins its list of horrors by eliminating the "right to work" laws in twenty-seven states that allow workers to say "thank you, *no*" to being forced to join a union and pay dues or fees.

The PRO Act plagiarizes from California's AB 5, the law that outlawed most independent contractors, prohibiting them from being their own bosses and forcing them to work as employees so they can be dragooned into a union and have dues extracted. The PRO Act also forces employers to give the home addresses and private phone numbers of all employees to union bosses so they can visit said workers at home at night and have them sign a piece of paper that will substitute for the previous secret ballot required to vote a union into power over all workers — those who voted "aye" and those who voted "no."

Taking Control of the Ballot Box and Election Law

Democrats are pushing for nationalization — not of the steel industry but of all election law in America through the "For the People Act" (HR 1). No longer would states and local governments run their own elections. This Congress, a Democrat-controlled Congress, would gerrymander the entire nation for at least the next ten years. Voter ID, the law in all twenty-seven EU nations and thirty-six states — gone.

The Federal Election Commission (FEC) also would cease to be a bipartisan, evenly balanced Republican/Democrat commission that requires commissioners of both parties to charge and convict a candidate with violating election law.

If enacted, the law would give the president's party the tie-breaking vote to investigate, convict, and punish any candidate for House, Senate, or president. That alone would allow the FEC, at present a flawed but neutral judge of electoral misbehavior, into an agency capable of determining ahead of time who wins the House and Senate in 2022. HR 1 already has passed the House with 220 Democrats voting yes, just one Democrat voting no, and not a single Republican vote. S 1, the bill's Senate counterpart, has forty-eight co-sponsors, and Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer is determined to force a vote on the legislation.

Biden's plan, if he can limit or end the filibuster, is to create the third great wave of government spending and power. The New Deal, enacted from 1933–39, and the Great Society were the first two "great leaps forward" in building a European-sized welfare state with workers in harness and paying through union dues

for the reelection of the almost permanent majority in Congress. (Presidents come and go; Washington is run from Congress.)

Half of the federal government, 10 percent of the nation's GDP, is consumed by programs enacted from 1934–36 and 1964–66.

From 1932 to 1994, the Republicans held the House and Senate for only four years — two years under Truman and two years under Eisenhower. That gives the Democrats a more perfect record than most one-party states around the globe. They had more complete control longer than Mexico but not quite as long a run as Castro.

Today, three factors inform the Democrats that they have to seize and maintain power *now* or lose slowly and then more rapidly if the rules are not changed.

First, in 1994, Republicans ran united, with more than 95 percent of candidates signing the Taxpayer Protection Pledge promising to oppose and vote against any tax hike. They won and held both the House and Senate 60 percent of the time since 1994. No taxes have been raised at the national level except during the four years of united Democrat control with Clinton in 1992–94 and Obama in 2008–10. A Democrat Party dependent on more government employment and increased welfare dependency for votes is terrorized and weakened politically by a Republican Party popular for consistently opposing tax hikes, and government funding for Democrat activists requires the tax increases that Republican control denies them.

Second, labor unions were created to be the funding structure of both the Democrat Party and the progressive Left, but that structure is faltering. Unions once forced 35 percent of the American workforce to pay them dues. But unions, like any parasite, weaken their host, and over time unionized firms and industries declined. Today only 6.3 percent of the private sector is unionized.

Since the 1960s, Democrats wisely have opened government jobs to unionization, and 35 percent of state and local workers are now unionized. Today the number of private- and public-sector union members is nearly equal. But the 2018 *Janus* Supreme Court decision ruled that no American could be forced to join a union or pay dues as a condition of working for state and local government. Over time that 35 percent will drift downward, and the Left cannot fund itself with a handful of billionaires and foundations. The total of fourteen million public and private union members paying an average of \$500 dues today amounts to \$7 billion each year and \$28 billion every four years.

Third, class warfare does not work well when 53 percent of American households have a 401K and/or an Individual Retirement Account (IRA). Unions are less attractive when sixty million Americans work at least in part as independent contractors. The majority of Americans want to be their own boss rather than working for someone else.

To continue as a political contender, the Democrat Party must break the rules and seize power now: dent or abolish the filibuster, pack the Court, add several states, weaken ballot security, and force workers into unions whether they like it or not.

Failing the above, the Democrat Party will drift downward into impotence and irrelevance as union membership — increasingly voluntary — declines and the vast majority of Americans become workers and savers and investors who will vote for a Republican Party that will never raise taxes. Stopping future tax hikes forces the government eventually to reform itself to cost less — and hire fewer Democrat precinct workers. Rinse. Repeat.

That's a virtuous cycle for the nation — and a death spiral for the party of the left.



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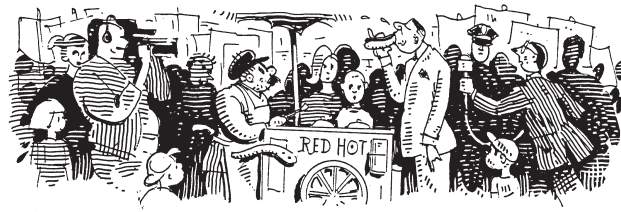


SEN. MITCH MCCONNELL



REP. DAN CRENSHAW

HAS YOUR ELECTED OFFICIAL?



Upward and Outward: America on the Move

Our country is becoming more diverse and dispersed as people leave cities and find opportunities elsewhere.

by Joel Kotkin

These are times, to paraphrase Thomas Paine, that try the souls of American optimists. A strain of insane ideologies, from QAnon to critical race theory, is running through our societies like a virus, infecting everything from political life and media to the schoolroom. Unable to unite even in the face of COVID-19, the country seems to be losing the post-pandemic struggle with China while American society becomes ever more feudalized into separate, and permanently unequal, classes.

Yet underneath the detritus of the age, a more hopeful future could be emerging. It will not be easy to get there, and it will evolve largely at the personal and local level outside the imbecilic national political culture. America's recovery won't come from our failed institutions but from our willingness to change conditions, on our own, when we no longer like them.

This recovery starts with a demonstrated ability to absorb and engage an ever more diverse population, including in our vast interior and suburban periphery. Our economic salvation lies with the creation of new businesses, from street-level retail to the entrepreneurial race into space. And the evidence so far is promising: Last year, after years of decline, new business formations rose to 4.4 million applications, compared to roughly 3.5 million in 2019. Self-employment, pummeled at first by the pandemic, has recovered more rapidly than conventional salaried jobs as more Americans reinvent themselves as entrepreneurs.

And supporting this growth is the bounty of our land itself. Providence has bequeathed us the most fertile, geographically diverse, resource-rich nation on Earth, with the second-largest expanse of arable land behind India, which has three times as many people to feed and far less efficient agriculture. We have land to accommodate people's housing dreams and not pack them into ever more crowded cities, as other countries are forced to do.

These three key factors — diversity, entrepreneurship, and resources — suggest that, despite the challenges we face, the optimists are right in betting on a bright future for America.



Joel Kotkin is author of *The Coming of Neo-Feudalism: A Warning to the Global Middle Class*, presidential fellow at Chapman University, and executive director of the Houston-based Urban Reform Institute.

Sadly, the current presidential administration seems inured to these realities and ignores much of our country's inherent strength. Biden's approach to urban transit shows how his administration has misunderstood or overlooked the movement of diverse groups of Americans currently taking place around the country.

The Biden administration wants to spend far more on trains and high-speed rail — \$165 billion for public transit against only \$115 billion to fix and modernize roads and bridges — despite the fact that public transit accounted for less than 2 percent of all urban travel *before* COVID.

Biden's Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg clearly wants to get Americans out of their cars and into trains and buses. He even claims that highways, like much else in pre-Biden America, are inherently racist. Yet public transit is not desirable or feasible for the vast majority of Americans of all races in most of the country. Urban centers like New York, Chicago, Philadelphia, San Francisco, Boston, and Washington accommodate nearly 60 percent of public transit use but only about 6 percent of the country's jobs. Attempts to get people out of their cars have been a failure virtually everywhere else. Looking at twenty-three completed rail systems over the past decade demonstrates no great tendency towards transit. Overall, where the new systems have opened, the percentage of commuters driving alone has *increased*.

And critically, the dense urban model, with a job-rich core surrounded by feeder communities, is unraveling. Since 2010, over 90 percent of metropolitan growth has been in suburbs and exurbs, a trend that has been further accelerated by COVID. Many have adapted to new hybrid work models, with remote work being done not only from homes but also in dispersed offices and coffee shops. Stanford economist Nicholas Bloom suggests at least 20 percent of the workforce will work remotely even after the pandemic ends, up from 5.7 percent in 2019.

Some, like J.P. Morgan's Jamie Dimon, will try to dragoon more employees into returning to the office, but they will face widespread resistance, according to human relations managers. In a recent survey of over five thousand employed adults, four in ten American workers expected some level of remote work flexibility post-pandemic. For many millennials, the hybrid and dispersed model, including suburban satellite offices, addresses issues like enhanced "life-work balance," something generally held critical to millennials, and particularly to women with children trying to get back into the labor force as schools reopen, according to a Conference Board survey.

So jobs seem destined to emigrate from downtowns. It's just a matter of how many and how far, as people find new opportunities elsewhere. Between September 2019 and September 2020, according to the firm American Communities and based on federal data, big cities lost nearly 10 percent of their jobs, followed by their close-in suburbs, while rural areas lost 6 percent and exurbs less than 5 percent.

These losses may well be enhanced by rising crime rates in large cities. Fear of crime now tops even the pandemic as a

national concern, and it's a hotly debated issue in the current New York City mayoral race. The failure to solve these problems is part of the reason that many companies are looking to invest elsewhere, primarily in smaller cities and suburbs, notes *Site Selection Magazine*.

Progressives' knee-jerk response to this kind of emigration is evoking the "white flight" narrative, including the charge that suburbs and single-family homes are inherently "racist." Although suburbs have often discriminated against minorities, in recent decades they have become increasingly integrated. Of the 13.3 million new suburbanites between 2000 and 2010, more than a third were Hispanic, compared to a fifth for whites. Brookings' William Frey calculated in 2011 that the percentage of suburbanites living in predominantly white suburbs fell from 51 percent to 39 percent during the preceding decade.

The Biden administration misrepresents this phenomenon, too, with a warped view of race relations that seems more attuned to the *New York Times* newsroom than reality. As the statistics above show, race relations in today's America, despite all their obvious problems, should be a source of pride, not derision.

I am old enough to remember seeing segregated hotels on the road from Washington to Williamsburg. I remember when a non-white person was rarely seen in much of the suburban landscape. Interracial couples, where not banned, were rare and often greeted at best with curiosity.

Today, despite the claims of alarmists on both left and right, America is not headed towards race war. At a time when "progressives" push segregated dorms, set up separate standards for minorities, and warn of "cultural appropriation," Americans are getting together across racial lines, including in the most intimate ways. Consider the rise and acceptance of interracial dating, up 40 percent since 2003 according to the Census, and marriage, up from 3 percent in 1967 to roughly one in six now.

Ironically, this "multiculturalism of the streets," as my old colleague Sergio Muñoz puts it, is now expanding in unexpected places like the suburban periphery, long castigated as a bastion for white racists. In the fifty largest U.S. metropolitan areas, 44 percent of residents live in racially and ethnically diverse suburbs, which range from 20 percent to 60 percent non-white. Nationwide, in the fifty-three largest metropolitan areas, more than three-quarters of Blacks and 88 percent of Hispanics now live in suburban or exurban areas. According to a recent study by the Urban Reform Institute, between 2000 and 2012–16, the urban core population of Blacks declined by six hundred thousand, while the suburban and exurban Black population increased by 4.4 million.

Minorities are also migrating away from big, coastal, progressive areas to vibrant "breakout cities" like Nashville, Austin, Dallas–Fort Worth, and Phoenix. As the Urban Reform Institute study demonstrates, minorities do better in terms of real incomes and home ownership in various southern and Midwestern cities than in Los Angeles, New York, Boston, San Francisco, and Chicago.

The dense urban model, with a job-rich core surrounded by feeder communities, is unraveling.

Much the same pattern can be seen among the foreign born. In the past decade, Dallas–Fort Worth has grown its foreign-born population by 30 percent while Los Angeles and Chicago actually suffered declines and New York largely stagnated, as shown in a recent report from Heartland Forward. Rather than settling in a few places, immigrants are engaging in the latest phase of the great American drama, creating new communities and reinvigorating all kinds of existing ones.

The second key to America’s recovery is investment in its economic resources: supporting its brain trust of entrepreneurs and refocusing on domestic industry.

For a generation, pundits on the right, such as Kevin Phillips, and even more so on the left, from Paul Kennedy and Jane Jacobs to Martin Jacques, have predicted the decline of the United States. To be sure, the combined forces of policy naïveté and corporate greed have left our economy highly vulnerable to other countries, notably to China. During the COVID-19 pandemic, we found ourselves hostage to China for everything from pharmaceuticals needed to combat the disease’s symptoms to masks and sanitary equipment.

We’re not dependent on other countries just for medical equipment. Cars can’t be built because chip-makers have off-shored so much production to places like Taiwan and Korea; electronic gear does not arrive because it all comes from China and developing countries. China’s rise in particular cost us three million jobs, most painfully evident in the consumer electronics and tech sector. The most notable of these companies is Apple, which is almost completely dependent on production from China. We’re feeding the growth of a ruthless and unscrupulous competitor in China, whose share of the world’s economic output has grown dramatically from 4 percent in 1990 to a projected 21 percent in 2022, according to the World Bank.

But COVID — and the 2016 election of Donald Trump — may have awakened some from their globalist slumbers. The annual rate of jobs coming from offshore has increased from six thousand in 2010 to over four hundred thousand in 2019, suggests the Reshoring Initiative. That year, for the first time in a decade, the percentage of United States manufacturing goods that were imported dropped, a recent Kearny study notes, with much of the shift coming from East Asia.

Even our usually brain-dead political establishment embraces this shift back toward domestic manufacturing, a rare bit of consensus evidenced by the nearly unanimous passage of the “Buy American Act.” Even as the pandemic was shutting down some sectors, growth in medical products, personal protective equipment (PPE) — gowns, gloves, masks, and materials for protective barriers like plexiglass — helped manufacturing grow by seven hundred thousand jobs by June 2020, after hitting a decade-long low earlier in the pandemic.

In reality, China’s challenge is not insurmountable. As its repression of the Uighurs and Hong Kong makes clear, Chinese leaders can no longer maintain power without resorting to brutal

The junction of demographic diversity, entrepreneurial ingenuity, and intelligent use of our land resources could help us forge a brighter future for most Americans.

measures. Other vulnerabilities, such as a looming demographic decline, including a record-low birth rate, massive corporate debt, and a history of environmental disasters and serial pandemics, make China less than an unassailable superpower.

Our country’s physical endowment is the third key to a reinvigorated America. How we respond to environmental concerns and use our natural energy resources will shape our ability to compete. The relatively strong U.S. economy has been

bolstered by the rising use of shale gas, which has reduced greenhouse gases far more than heavily subsidized, intermittent, expensive renewable energy sources. Yet the Biden “climate plan,” already largely in place in California, means higher gas prices, and the administration’s efforts to ban natural gas and nuclear power put us in danger of squandering our enormous resource advantage for the benefit of other countries, notably China.

Under the Paris Accords, newly reentered under Biden, we are allowing China and other competitors to keep producing cheap fossil fuel energy while we essentially obliterate the American energy industry. According to a Chamber of Commerce report, a full national

fracking ban would cost fourteen million jobs, far more than the eight million lost in the Great Recession, with the potential of instantly turning some now-vital smaller towns into slums. President Biden has promised to spend \$500 billion each year on abating climate change — about 13 percent of all federal revenue. The economic impact of this plan, estimates economist Bjorn Lomborg, would reach \$5 trillion, more than the entire federal budget.

A renewed America needs the ability to power our economy efficiently as well as more sustainably. Wiping out much of the U.S. economy may not bother university professors, investment bankers, tech oligarchs, and others who are suited to reap rewards from the so-called “Great Reset.” But it won’t do much for those who work in factories, warehouses, farms, mines, and the energy sector.

The junction of demographic diversity, entrepreneurial ingenuity, and intelligent use of our land resources could help us forge a brighter future for most Americans. The current labor shortage, particularly in industry, seems to be a product of low labor force growth and a sinking birth rate; U.S. labor force growth between ages sixteen and sixty-four has dropped from 20 percent in the 1980s to less than 5 percent in the last decade.

This creates a unique opportunity for working-class Americans. Even before the pandemic, wages for lower-income laborers were rising for the first time in decades. Today, even with high unemployment over 6 percent and over eight million fewer positions available, there are 7.4 million unfilled jobs.

The question is what kind of policy environment would allow these workers and grassroots entrepreneurs who may employ them to take advantage of these changes. The current progressive agenda, unfortunately embraced by President Biden, is not what



most Americans need. They want jobs and the opportunity to own a home and support their families. In reality, the progressive activists’ agenda is supported by barely 8 percent of the electorate, according to a survey conducted by the nonpartisan More in Common group. Another study found 80 percent of all Americans, including large majorities of millennials and racial minorities, find the “politically correct” agenda “dangerous.”

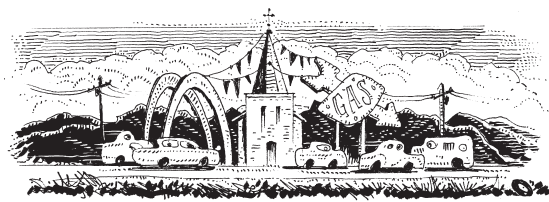
This suggests that grassroots trends will create conditions for new and often shifting coalitions. Conservatives and many leftists may find areas of agreement on anti-trust regulation, particularly of banks and tech firms. Socially conservative minorities and the traditional Right might find common ground on issues like new sex education standards, child-care policy, or political indoctrination at schools. Conservatives can connect with both minorities such as African-Americans and even more so immigrants, who, according to one recent survey, are twice as conservative in their social views as the general population.

None of this suggests that everyone will embrace a revived American future. Oligarchs, Wall Street, and their corporate

and nonprofit allies, backed by their libertarian apologists and consultants, will not want to see their power challenged. Various prominent race-hustlers will resist changing progressives’ political focus from “systemic racism” toward promoting upward mobility, and green scolds will find their analyses and policy demands again questioned, despite the best efforts of the social media mafia to block discussion.

In the long run, however, areas of consensus could emerge once Americans, irrespective of their politics, look for solutions that truly align with our interests and reflect our basic values and aspirations. If we do so, America will grow into a new, reinvigorated version of the land of promise it has been for so many generations of its citizens.





Housing Crunch Points to Massive Market Meltdown

If you thought COVID sending city dwellers to the suburbs was the whole story, think again.

by James Howard Kunstler

The housing shortage in the USA is a function of so many market distortions, perversions, delusions, and convulsions that there's little *real* left in real estate. It's pointless to even start with the common stats — we'll get to some in due course — because the macro view is so much more germane than any raft of numbers. And the macro is this: we've entered an epochal crisis of all the organizing elements and principles in advanced economies, and whatever behavior you see out there reflects that disorder, including the property market.

I've called this crisis "the long emergency." It's largely about losing the energy mojo that has made our standard of living possible. Shale oil was the last hurrah of that, and now shale is stumbling because the oil companies can't make money producing it. More than two hundred shale oil companies went bankrupt in 2020, and production is still down nearly two million barrels a day from the all-time high in 2019. Replacing oil with green energy is just wishful thinking. We're not going to run suburbia, Disney World, and the interstate highways on any combination of solar, wind, hydro, or recycled french-fry oil. Rather, what we face is a declining standard of living, in ways we are proving unable to accept and prepare for.

This clearly manifests in the declining incomes and prospects of the struggling middle class and the onerous debt loads they have been forced to assume just to keep up with ordinary bills and mortgages. Meanwhile, the Federal Reserve jacks stock values, setting up a Potemkin veneer of prosperity that only benefits the 1-percenters.

Another way this energy quandary expresses itself is in the breakdown of financial and banking relations, because falling energy inputs mean no more growth, and no more growth means we can't pay back that monstrous debt we accumulated trying to fake our way out of this predicament. And now this melodrama is nearing its climax either in debt default or ruinous inflation. That scene is already being garnished with social and political disorder. COVID-19 has accelerated the process while producing an array of strange economic effects, such as the federal government competing with the job market by paying people not to work, along with people's mad rush to buy houses away from the cities.

The housing crunch is not simply about a commodity called housing; it's about how human beings occupy the landscape. For decades in America, that has meant mostly

suburbia, with the big cities divided up between the hipster hot spots (New York, San Francisco, Seattle) and the pitiful losers (Baltimore, Detroit, St. Louis), the rural places left over for agribiz and recreation, depending on the scenery, and, finally, the small towns of America just silently decrepitating in the background. All that is changing now. All that is in play, and we are badly missing the message.

For instance, at least 15.9 million people fled cities during the COVID-19 pandemic. This was not just a simple dynamic of people running away from the disease. Hot-spot cities were already feeling a drop in the quality of life before the pandemic: a blight of homeless people on the streets, rising crime, and failing public schools. The pandemic pushed the upper middle class over the edge. The amenities that had made city life bearable — restaurants, the arts, big league sports — were shut down, leaving denizens stuck in claustrophobic apartments with nowhere to go.

The *coup de grâce* for the cities was working from home. It wasn't long before that novelty looked like a permanent condition, which suggested the need for a better home office than the kitchen table. Corporations also saw a great opportunity for savings, and many decided to downsize their office space. These effects cascaded. Without hordes of office workers on the streets in places like Midtown Manhattan, ground-floor retail started to die. The Black Lives Matter riots and looting finished a lot of them off. The whole business model of the giant metroplex city, per se, wobbled.

The bigger picture is that the giant metroplex cities have achieved a scale that is inconsistent with a no-growth economy. There is no option for them now but contraction, and the process is apt to be messy because a lot of real estate will lose value, and there will be battles over who gets to occupy the districts that retain value, such as waterfronts. Midtown Manhattan is filled with skyscrapers that were transformed almost overnight from assets to liabilities. At less than 20 percent occupancy, the office towers can't cover their taxes, utilities, maintenance, and mortgage debts. That's bad enough. Next will come the grim recognition that apartment towers are mere accessories of the office towers, and if far fewer people are going to work in the skyscrapers, then the condo towers will likewise devalue. New York has already lost a big chunk of tax revenue in the flight of nearly three hundred thousand people, most of them six-figure earners.

A lot of them went to the leafy suburbs in Connecticut, Long Island, and New Jersey. There's no need to commute if you're working from a home office, and there's much more room for the whole family in a raised ranch than in a two-bedroom, two-bathroom city apartment. Plus, fresh air and green grass! Better schools, too! "We should have done this years ago," many probably thought.

Like a lot of great blunders in history, it probably seemed like a good idea at the time. The suburbs, alas, represent an even less viable living arrangement than the cities. You may not need to commute for now, but driving is mandatory for everything else you have to do there, since suburbia is based on the strict

separate zoning of activities: all the homes in one place, stores in another, and everything else in its own isolated pod, all connected by those ribbons of asphalt. Many assume that the quandary of our oil supply will be "solved" by electric cars. I believe we will be disappointed by that, for reasons that would require another essay.

Just notice, for instance, that the financial quandary is as much of a threat to mass-motoring as the question of whether our cars are powered by oil or electric batteries. The no-growth economy that's been decimating the middle class means that fewer families are stable and solvent enough to qualify for car loans, not to mention mortgages. Without a stable middle class, suburbia can't cover its costs. Its business model is broken. Households skated through the COVID-19 year with mortgage payments suspended under the

CARES Act and direct cash aid for lost incomes. That won't go on forever. In April 2021, one in five renters was behind on rent, and just over ten million homeowners were behind on mortgage payments. The Biden administration extended the eviction moratorium until June 30, with up to six months of additional mortgage forbearance, in three-month increments.

This, of course, is another way of kicking cans down the road, and it's another manifestation of America's horrific debt problem. Homeowners and renters may skate for a while longer, but the ice is getting mighty thin. The median home mortgage in America runs about \$1,500. A year of deferred payments adds up to \$18,000, which will have to be paid back eventually. Meanwhile, at least 25 percent of Americans have no savings and live paycheck-to-paycheck. Also consider that unpaid debts don't just vanish. Creditors end up eating them, meaning banks and landlords. These chains of unpaid debt building in the financial system are apt to break it. We just don't know how that will finally express itself, say, in an asset-value crash, bank failures, or a currency crisis. Eventually we will see a wave of foreclosures, which will drive down the value of all houses and leave a lot of homeowners underwater, with houses worth less than their monthly carrying costs. If inflation continues apace, interest rates will have to rise, including mortgage interest — currently at historic lows — and that will necessarily further drive down the price of houses to keep them even theoretically affordable. That will end the current game of musical chairs.

For now, we live under the illusion that most of the conditions of the post-war decades will persist, and we make our plans based on error. Rather, we're freefalling into a new era of economic reversal and turbulence. You certainly can't assume that the single-family house on a quarter-acre lot three miles from the nearest store will remain the basic unit of the property market. Households are already reorganizing emergently, with grown children living in Mom's basement into their thirties. Along with everything else becoming unaffordable, these grown kids may not be able to park Mom in a senior care facility when the time comes. They may not even be able to pay for the routine maintenance of a McHouse built out of strand-board and vinyl. Where and how will the generation after them be able to live?

The most likely destiny for many of our suburbs is as slums, salvage yards, and ruins.



James Howard Kunstler is the author of *The Long Emergency* and *the World Made by Hand* series of novels. He blogs every Monday and Friday at www.kunstler.com.



Biden Follows California's High-Tax Lead

From his capital-gains tax plan to his labor rules, the new president is echoing policies that are driving Californians to other states.

by **Steven Greenhut**

For the first time in at least a century, California has actually lost population. The latest Department of Finance data shows that the state lost 182,000 people last year. Californians have for years been leaving for states with friendlier tax and regulatory climates, but immigration and birth rates have kept the state's population growing, albeit slowly. Not any longer.

The newest state population numbers don't mean much in terms of budgeting or politics (beyond the loss of a congressional seat), but they're the latest reminder that California is no longer a particularly appealing place to live, let alone a magnet for families and entrepreneurs from elsewhere. Think of it as Illinois, Ohio, or West Virginia, but with sunny beaches, palm trees, sprawling homeless encampments, and \$1.5 million condos.

The news nevertheless "was a gut check for state officials — and for Californians' self-esteem," as I explained in my *Orange County Register* column. "The Golden State has long beckoned people from across America and the globe. That concept is in our DNA — the idea of leaving behind encrusted communities and coming here to start anew."

There is, however, one hope that California's progressive officials continue to hold. They can't stop people from voting with their feet, but they can make the rest of the country more like us, thus reducing our competitive disadvantage in all things from tax to labor policy. Sensible people look at California to see what not to do, but President Joe Biden seems to believe the state's spin and has already filled his administration with California leftovers.

In reality, Californians from all economic segments are leaving. Middle-class people are driven out by the soaring cost of living (especially housing) caused by land-use controls, high taxes, electric-vehicle mandates, and whatnot. Businesses — including many tech firms that pay the bulk of California's sky-high income taxes — seek out less punitive regulatory environments. Even low-wage immigrants are fleeing, drawn elsewhere by job opportunities.

One particularly disastrous state policy doesn't get enough attention. Everyone knows our taxes are high, but consider that California has the highest income taxes in



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City View, 2021 (Bill Wilson Studio)

There's a lot of loose talk lately about a "Great Reset." There will be one, but probably not the grandiose globalist fantasy that many expect, just a much lower standard of living and very different new terms for carrying on daily life. Responding to the coming changes has to do with basically rescaling everything we do from the current mode of gigantism back to things smaller, closer to home, and made or done with much more human attention. The cities will still exist because they occupy important geographical sites, but they will be a lot smaller than they are today, and the journey to that new disposition of things will be long and rocky.

And I would not plant my flag in the suburbs. Most of them won't even be suitable for retrofit or adaptive reuse. Their demise will be quick and dirty by historical measure. The Jolly Green Giant won't stride into the housing subdivisions, pick up the houses, and move them closer together to make "walkable communities." A reset to a lower standard of living implies less available capital to accomplish proposed schemes such as converting shopping centers into mixed-use towns. The Happy Motoring era is drawing to a close. The most likely destiny for many of our suburbs is as slums, salvage yards, and ruins. Building them seemed like a good idea at the time, and that time is now over.

The most favorable places in America will soon be the ones that are the most disfavored today: the small towns and small cities, especially those close to productive agriculture and situated along North America's inland waterway system — because the economy of this continent will be much more internally focused. The high-tech industrial orgy of the past two-hundred-plus years may come to be seen as a kind of great pulsation that swelled and then subsided, leaving us to find less complex modes of subsistence. After all, there have been many such pulsations in history.

As the contraction occurs, we're also likely to see very different modes of household organization, probably multi-generational, and perhaps — get ready for this — including servants, apprentices, and boarders. The houses themselves will have to be built to last. There will be plenty of salvage available from the places left behind, but probably fewer available new materials, even concrete and sheetrock, which require huge amounts of energy and complex manufacturing chains. If you can build a house designed to last, you may live in it for most of your life.

Think all this is strange, even outlandish? If you stopped a businessman in Cadillac Square, Detroit, in 1957 and told him his city would be a haunted ruin in the year 2000, without any war happening there, he never would have believed you. History is a prankster. We're in just the first act of this transition. ✎

the nation — with a top rate of 13.3 percent. These are steeply progressive taxes, meaning that the wealthiest earners — you know, the people who create companies and provide jobs — pay the lion's share of the state's tax burden.

Even some Democrats have complained that the system makes California's budget highly volatile, yet Biden wants to echo those policies by doubling the nation's capital-gains tax rate. He needs to pay attention to how that's played out in California.

"California's tax system, which relies heavily on the wealthy for state income, is prone to boom-and-bust cycles," wrote Judy Lin in a 2018 article in CalMatters. "While it delivers big returns

California has the most generous welfare programs in the country, but its policies have obliterated good-paying jobs and given the state the nation's highest poverty rate.

from the rich whenever Wall Street goes on a bull run, it forces state and local governments to cut services, raise taxes or borrow money in a downturn." One need only look at how the state weathered the last recession to understand the problem — a free-spending cycle was followed by large public cutbacks. In my view, the state should cut away, but it instead created pressure for even higher taxes.

The president's American Families Plan threatens to do to the federal budget what it has done to California's budget process. Biden argues that successful companies must pay their "fair share," but they pay far more than their fair share. As Lin noted, "the top 1 percent of [California] taxpayers now generate half of personal income tax receipts."

That imbalance helps explain why, despite the widespread hardships caused by California's COVID-19 lockdowns, the state budget is enjoying a reported \$75.7 billion surplus. The Legislative Analyst's Office argues that the surplus actually is half that size because the governor is including money earmarked for debt payments and public schools, but no matter. It's still an impressive feat — even if one ignores the state's growing unfunded pension and health-care liabilities for the state's gilded class of government employees and retirees.

The surplus isn't a total good-news story. It reminds us of the uneven results of the state's pandemic policies. It leads state officials, basking in self-congratulation, to underplay the economic pain their policies caused. It gives the state's leaders access to far too much cash. During boom times, California's government spends like crazy and has a habit of creating new programs that suddenly are "underfunded" when the stock market returns go south.

Facing a recall election, Gov. Gavin Newsom recently announced a \$100 billion spending plan (the deficit, plus federal bailouts) that showers residents and businesses with rebate checks that might tone down anger at his handling of the

pandemic and mishandling of the Employment Development Department. (In the latter situation, the state failed to provide unemployed Californians with legitimate benefits, even as it handed out \$31 billion — with a "b" — in dubious claims.)

When introducing budgets during his administration, former Gov. Jerry Brown routinely would point to big charts that showed far more years of red ink than black ink. Every time he released a budget, he would remind reporters about the dangers of overspending during flush years — and then introduce a budget that obliterated past spending records. Nevertheless, he had a point about the perils of our income-tax-dependent budget.

Of course, governors and legislators can't resist spending money, and a high capital-gains tax only encourages them to spend even more than they usually can get away with. More significantly, high capital-gains rates discourage economic growth, depress jobs creation, and encourage wealthy people to spend more time pursuing tax-avoidance strategies than investment strategies. California has the most generous welfare programs in the country, but its policies have obliterated good-paying jobs and given the state the nation's highest poverty rate (adjusted for cost of living).

Note the number of California companies that are leaving the state. This exodus had California's officials concerned about tax implications, though not concerned enough to slow their taxing and spending. Just last year, Oracle, Palantir, and Hewlett-Packard Enterprise moved away, along with a number of billionaires who keep the state's budget afloat, including Elon Musk.

Under the Biden plan, California's rate won't be as comparatively awful (until the state boosts it again), but it will depress U.S. investment. "Capital is mobile across borders, so higher capital gains taxes would prompt investment outflows," wrote the Cato Institute's Chris Edwards. "The U.S. federal-state capital gains tax rate of about 28 percent is already higher than the average rate in other high-income countries of just 18 percent, so we should be cutting our rate, not increasing it." That's something to consider.

Sure, the Biden administration is pushing a global-minimum tax to discourage out-of-country investments, but that will only raise the costs to American consumers of everyday items such as insurance and further depress economic growth. It would be sad but fitting if an administration devoted to implementing California's economic policies would see an exodus of U.S. businesses overseas and a worsening of income inequality. 🐦



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FREE THE MARKET



Biden's Administrative State Erases Trump's Deregulatory Initiatives

The new president is on track to beat his former boss in expanding the Code of Federal Regulations.

by Kevin R. Kosar

The Biden administration proposed more than eight hundred new regulations in its first four months in office. These new rules, which will have the force of law if adopted, were issued by seventy-nine different agencies, from the Agency for International Development to the Workers Compensation Programs Office. The three most prolific of the bunch were the Federal Aviation Administration (215), Environmental Protection Agency (188), and Federal Communications Commission (64).

To be sure, many of these proposed regulations are unobjectionable. For example, most of the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) proposed rules are mere adjustments of existing airspace use rules or changes that aim to reduce the odds of catastrophic aircraft accidents due to mechanical failures. And who will care whether or not the Federal Communications Commission agrees to Sinclair Media's request for "the substitution of channel 15 for channel 7 at Redding, California in the DTV Table of Allotments"?

But other Biden regulatory actions have sparked political outcries, and deservedly so. The Department of Education (DoE) offers a particularly egregious example with a

regulation that would inject wokeness into a civics and American history grants program. The regulation opines that "COVID-19 — with its disproportionate impact on communities of color — and the ongoing national reckoning with systemic racism have highlighted the urgency of improving racial equity throughout our society, including in our education system."

Hence, the DoE proposes to favor grant applications that would fund teaching that "reflect[s] the diversity, identities, histories, contributions, and experiences of all students [to] create inclusive, supportive, and identity-safe learning environments." To get the money, applicants "must" show their teaching would "take into account systemic marginalization, biases, inequities, and discriminatory policy" and meet various other liberal criteria.

Kooky regulations like this one have drawn a lot of attention. Less commented upon is the Biden administration's rollback of Trump's attempt to curb the regulatory state's relentless growth.

Donald Trump opened a multi-front battle against regulation upon entering office in 2017. He started his deregulatory push by announcing a temporary pause to all proposed regulations that had been initiated under President Barack Obama. Trump also began withdrawing various major regulations issued by his predecessor. Marquee regulatory actions, such as net neutrality, the Clean Power

Plan, and the Waters of the United States rule, were axed.

Trump's arrival at 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue also elicited deregulatory efforts from Capitol Hill. GOP legislators revived the Congressional Review Act (CRA), which had been little used since its creation in 1996. This law creates a fast track for legislators to send rule-killing bills to the president's desk. With a willing partner in the White House, the GOP sent sixteen CRA resolutions to Trump.

Trump's temporary pause, rollback, and CRA actions were mostly whack-a-mole exercises. Meanwhile, the administrative state he inherited mostly kept doing what it does — regulating. The executive branch proposed 578 new regulations during Trump's first four months.

In order to make a real and lasting impact on the size of the corpus of federal regulations, Donald Trump issued an executive order that stipulated that each executive agency had to delete two regulations to be permitted to create one new regulation. Trump augmented this "two for one" proposal with the mandate that agencies establish regulatory budgets. Wonks for decades had advocated that America adopt regulatory budgeting, which is used in other nations like Denmark and Canada. This scheme makes agencies price out the benefits and costs of the regulations they issue and keep within their spending caps. Trump's executive order demanded that

agencies establish regulatory budgets by 2018 and tally an annual cost of zero.

Together Trump's deregulatory policies had the potential to make a real dent in the administrative state, which grows relentlessly. On average, the executive branch finalizes four thousand rules each year and proposes another 2,700, and the number of pages of federal regulations grew by ten thousand in the second term of the Obama presidency alone.

As if these deregulatory actions were not enough, the Trump administration also took on "regulatory dark matter." When agencies make rules, they are supposed to follow the regulatory process required by the Administrative Procedures Act of 1946. Unfortunately, that act does not extend to various forms of guidance issued by agencies that have the effect of rules. For example, Obama's Department of Education issued a "dear colleague letter" to post-secondary institutions that explained its new interpretation of Title IX and its application to transgender students. Often these edicts are not made widely available, which makes them all the more problematic from the perspective of those of us who believe in democratic self-governance.

Trump's Executive Order 13891 told agencies to "treat guidance documents as non-binding both in law and in practice," which amounts to "Don't sue anyone

for noncompliance." His mandate also required the government to establish a "single, searchable, indexed database that contains or links to all guidance documents in effect from such agency or component." Regulatory dark matter would be brought into the light of day.

Altogether then, Trump's deregulatory agenda was ambitious. Indubitably it was marred by some stumbles along the way. There were for example, some conceptual confusions in his regulatory budgeting executive order. Trump's inability to stay focused on any one issue for any length of time meant that implementation of these efforts flagged at points. Any chance that deregulation would take was eliminated by Trump's failure to push Congress to cement these policies into law in his first two years, when the GOP controlled both chambers of Congress.

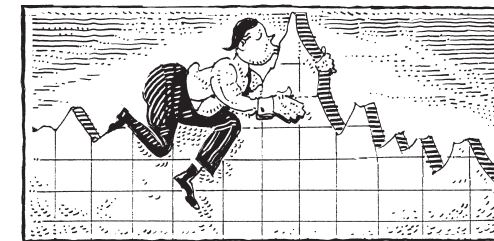
Regardless, one can be sure of one thing: none of these actions would have been taken during a Hillary Clinton presidency.

President Joe Biden has quietly made it clear that he wants to undo this deregulation. He issued a sprawling executive order on his first day in office that included the abolition of Trump's "two for one," regulatory budgeting, and regulatory dark matter mandates.

Biden's and congressional Democrats' enactment of massive new spending legislation will of necessity spawn more regulations to interpret its implementation. They have begun to put the Congressional Review Act to work for them. In late April, the Democrats struck down a Trump rule that eased an Obama mandate about methane, a greenhouse gas. With Hill Republicans showing hostility to many of the administration's big plans, Biden may well try to achieve his goals by cranking up his regulatory machine. Obama did the same when his legislative proposals were rebuffed, unleashing his "pen and phone" approach to governance.

Yet Biden may not be able to entirely reverse Trump's deregulatory legacy. With the advice and consent of the Senate GOP, Trump installed 234 judges on the federal bench. Some of them will hear cases involving agency regulatory actions and are skeptical of agencies wielding legislative power in the form of regulation. "Biden and his agencies will face legal headwinds that Obama and his agencies didn't," Adam White, an attorney and expert on the administrative state at George Mason University's Antonin Scalia Law School and the American Enterprise Institute, told the *Wall Street Journal* recently. Already, Trump-appointed judges have blocked Biden policies related to immigration and evictions. More regulatory rebuffs are sure to come. ❧

ECONOMICS GONE WILD



America Desperately Needs to Embrace Trumponomics

Neoliberals have sold out our country. Trump knows how we can take it back.

by Adam Korzeniewski

President Trump sent the D.C. establishment into hysterics by running on industrial policy, national economics, immigration restriction, and skepticism of globalism. But Trump's economic worldview is not new; its core tenets were put forth by the Republican Party at its founding. Ideas that seem radical to today's Beltway Republican elite were once mainstream GOP economic philosophy. But now the conservative elite suppresses these views and shuts them out of the policy discussion.

The main reason for this is the modern Republican Party's embrace of neoliberal economics. It finds common ground here with the contemporary political Left. Neoliberalism, broadly defined, constitutes a wide range of policies, including the deregulation of markets, elimination of trade barriers, increases in immigration, and the globalization of capital flow. These policies lead to the liberal calcification of corporations and government bureaucracy. They also treat

people as interchangeable components in the economy, in which individual value and cultural norms are meaningless.

The neoliberal worldview is hyper-utilitarian and anti-American. People are not interchangeable economic cogs, and individual Americans' cultural values and norms matter in determining national outcomes. But while the dignity and livelihoods of Americans were once held as an important policy consideration, now they're willingly traded away for corporate profit.

Neoliberalism and utilitarianism are antithetical to the founding of the Republican Party as well. Lincoln's Republican Party was premised on Henry Clay's American System of Political Economy, which focused on internal improvements (infrastructure), tariffs to protect industry, and subsidies when necessary. Clay's system improved on Alexander Hamilton's many writings, most notably his 1791 *Report on Manufactures*. Clay's notions of national economics served as a mechanism to make a prosperous American nation in the face of foreign hostility and general poverty. Under this system, the United States became an economic juggernaut.

In contrast to Clay's system, the history of free-trade activism in the United States is closely tied to the slave labor lobby

and the commodification of human life. Henry Carey, Lincoln's economic adviser, described the period under the Democratic President James Buchanan as the "great free-trade crisis," during which the slave labor lobby increased its strength in the United States and guaranteed civil war. Powerful foreign financial and business institutions in London and Paris backed the slave establishment. Both England and France invested in short-term lending in the Antebellum South and traded securities backed by the value of slaves as if they were mortgages today.

At this point, America's economic future looked bleak. The commodification of labor, opening of borders, and expansion of the plantation system were interlinked. The westward expansion of slavery and lack of tariffs meant that slavery would continue and that the United States would become an economic satrap of the European colonial powers Americans had fought off time and time again. In response to critics of this approach, the slavery lobby argued about the importance of efficiency of markets and why the United States couldn't make its own finished goods. This again is utilitarian. Efficiency for efficiency's sake means that the human condition is secondary to the material, and lives are universally

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interchangeable — a view that can and does lead to evils like slavery. But Lincoln, a student of Clay, knew that Clay's American System could make America great and could do away with slavery once and for all.

Fast forward to today, when we are once again faced with serious national crises. Donald Trump woke a long-slumbering spirit of American self-confidence in the face of national peril. Pundits were lauding a waning America and elites were excitedly looking to the rise of China while the American people were suffering. Undaunted, Trump took up Lincoln's mantle by reintroducing policies that had huge success in post-slavery America. It's ironic that a man many conservative intellectuals consider a buffoon has a better sense of the wisdom of Republican economic historical norms than the professional *apparatchiks*.

On the other side of the aisle, the Democrat Party seeks to crush the middle-class yeomen of the United States precisely because of their willingness to vote for Trump. Not coincidentally, this, too, has parallels to Lincoln's time, when Democrats were similarly hostile to yeoman farms owned by citizens, not serviced by slaves. The average American is not useful for their ends.

Like modern D.C. Republicans, congressional Democrats are also neoliberals. It's just a matter of degree; Democrats are willing to go further to crush middle-class Americans. Using many of the same cheap-labor, outsourcing, and regulatory policies, neoliberals put American workers in a vise. President Biden's neoliberal economic model leeches off the entropy of American economic power to accelerate the end of domestic industries and American jobs in favor of international corporate profits.

Sadly, this mistreatment of American workers is not new. The post-World War II era, the Cold War, and after were all periods of mass liberalization of the United States economy. Granted, the U.S. did grow massively when it opened borders and became the dominant exporter of goods to aligned and non-aligned nations. But these policies were not without pernicious consequences. The borderless American economic policy created worldwide corporations led by people who saw themselves less as Americans and more as a global elite. They brought with them

a stateless, unpatriotic social and political liberalism that eroded our economy and institutions back home.

These neoliberal policies contributed to the destruction of the family unit (fueled by fewer well-paying jobs for working-class men) with the resulting collapse of birth rates (because many Americans lacked money to raise a family) and a decline in a meaningful spiritual life (replaced with a kind of secular utopianism). American workers were replaced with foreign labor. The goal was, and remains, cheap material goods at the expense of all else.

All of this proves that neoliberalism is an economic system with often harmful social and political consequences. Neoliberals want to forget that politics and economics are inextricably linked; both are predicated upon social cooperation. While American political and business leaders were developing domestic industries in allied states, they were selling off the livelihoods of America's children. And there are no guarantees that new industries will rise to replace the departing industries. Post-war conservatism had no coherent answer to the social and cultural problems brought on by exporting American jobs and innovation. And conservatives are still struggling to respond to the problem.

The United States must embark upon a journey back to Lincoln's economics. Lincoln understood that a country must have businesses that own the nation's production. Trading soybeans for computer parts is what a colony, not a nation, would do. That's why the British Empire wanted the American colonies to trade commodities for finished goods, to never industrialize: productive power is equivalent to national power. The Founding Fathers rebelled against Britain in part to own their means of production.

A nation is not free when it cannot provide the materials needed for productive independence. Today's American policymakers instead place the United States in treaties with imperial empires that will use their trade and economic gain to impose their social and cultural (and maybe even military) dogma on their foes. See how Hollywood and the NBA have utterly capitulated socially and politically to the communist Chinese for access to their economic markets.

Our economic vulnerability expands as we fail to address our debt and now inflation problems. In addition to regulatory costs,

Biden and the rest of the neoliberals have added an inadvertent regressive "tax" on the economy with inflation. This "tax" drives up the price of goods ahead of the purchasing power of the regular American. The wealthiest can hedge against this with their investment portfolios. But again, the poor and middle class are harmed the most, especially if they inadvertently pay more in taxes as a consequence of inflation pushing them into a higher bracket.

And America continues to trade the future for the present by inflating its currency to monetize the trade deficit. The typical Beltway solution to this problem would be economic austerity or transformative, budget-busting spending measures, but these do not bring back the productive capabilities that have been sent overseas or build new industries at home. The priority in a New American System should be to stop the metaphorical bleeding by focusing on America's ability to manufacture the products we need.

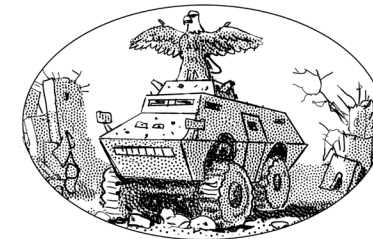
President Trump sought to address the excesses and abuses of neoliberalism in a time when many were discounting America's future. It is time for us to think about tomorrow by learning the lessons of the past and borrowing from America's own intellectual heritage. It's time to examine Abraham Lincoln's legacy and understand what he understood: that humans are not commodities and should not be treated as such. American citizens have intrinsic value, and they deserve meaningful work. Work leads to marriage, to children, to homes, and, yes, even to consumer goods. It all depends on businesses and jobs being in our country. Enough with exporting innovation. It is time to rebuild America. 🦅



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BORDER LINES



Biden's Open Borders Drain American Resources

And deny citizens their rightful political role regarding immigration.

by Jason Richwine

Rarely is the sequence of cause and effect so clear. The current surge of migrants at our southern border is the direct result of the Biden administration eliminating the Trump rules that had once tamed the flow. Gone are the "safe third country" agreements that helped migrants apply for asylum in countries through which they had already traveled. Gone is the "remain in Mexico" policy that ensured a mere application for asylum would not be a free ticket into the United States. At the same time, Obama-era "catch and release" for minors and family units has made a comeback. As word has spread of this lax enforcement, more and more migrants throughout the world are attempting the journey.

The border crisis has immediate legal and humanitarian consequences, but what can we expect the downstream effects on our economy to be? How will American workers and taxpayers ultimately fare? While advocates insist that the economic effects of immigration are virtually all positive, a fair assessment of the literature cannot support such a rosy outlook. In reality, the economic impact

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of immigration is mixed. It offers some benefits for Americans but also some costs, and weighing those competing impacts is a matter for the political process. Uncontrolled immigration denies Americans the right to that process.

One of the most straightforward economic benefits of immigration is that it can hold down labor costs, thus reducing the prices of goods and services for consumers. The corresponding downside, of course, is that U.S. workers see a decline in their wages. The National Academies of Sciences demonstrated this tradeoff in its book-length report published in 2016. In one of the report's simpler models, U.S. residents collected an annual \$54 billion in economic gains due to immigration. But those gains required the *transfer* of about \$500 billion from U.S. workers to owners of capital.

The distributional impact of immigration becomes even more concerning when we consider which workers are affected the most. Over the past fifty years, immigrants to the U.S. have been generally less skilled than the average U.S. worker, and this is especially true of the Central Americans who are now surging at the border. As a result, most will compete in the labor market with Americans who are similarly less skilled.

The gains in efficiency due to immigration therefore tend to come at the expense of the least-skilled U.S. workers.

The empirical evidence for this phenomenon was aptly summarized by the National Academies in its table of estimated wage effects. Out of the twenty-two estimates in that table, eighteen were negative, and most affected U.S. residents with low levels of education. The empirical studies do have a couple of drawbacks, however. First, they use complicated models that can be difficult to relate back to the real world. Second, because these models are so assumption-driven, they generate a wide range of estimates. Even though the literature points strongly toward negative wage effects, one can always find individual studies that claim zero impact from immigration.

For some real-world evidence that falsifies the "zero impact" theory, consider the multitude of cases filed by the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) against employers who openly favor immigrants over natives. The discrimination in these cases is not subtle. "All you Americans are fired" and "All you black American people, f*** you all ... just go to the office and pick up your check" are actual quotes from an EEOC

case against one Georgia farm. In case after case, the pattern of using immigration to depress wages and working conditions clearly emerges, and one need not be an econometrician to observe it.

Aside from the labor market, the other major economic impact of immigration falls on the government's finances, and here again the effects are mixed. On the positive side, immigrants make the U.S. economy larger. A larger GDP gives the U.S. government more resources to exert influence on the world stage. It also can boost pure public goods, such as national defense and scientific research.

Remember, however, that although immigration increases GDP, the vast majority of the economic gains go to immigrants themselves, with little impact on *per-person* GDP. And unlike national defense, most government services become proportionately more expensive as the population increases. Even services meant to benefit the community as a whole — such as parks, highways, and police — can become congested and require new investments when immigrants arrive.

Determining the overall fiscal impact of immigration can be complicated, but the National Academies report offers two intuitive lessons. First, today's immigrants as a whole are net fiscal drains — they receive more in services than they contribute in taxes. Second, although long-term estimates are less reliable, immigrants who arrive with no more than a high school diploma are likely to be net fiscal drains throughout their lives, while immigrants who arrive with at least a four-year college degree are likely to be net fiscal contributors. The U.S. may therefore wish to select for the highest-skilled immigrants, but no selection is possible while the border remains porous.

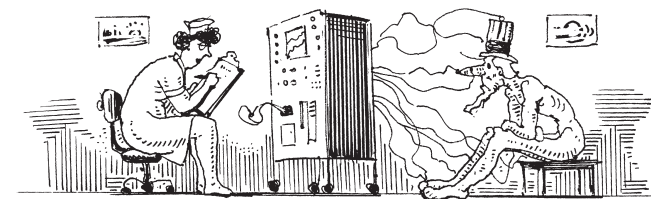
In an effort to reduce the budgetary strain associated with immigration, the Trump administration strengthened the rule against admitting aliens who are likely to become “public charges,” meaning dependent on government for their basic needs. While prior administrations had defined dependency as receiving cash welfare or institutional care, the Trump administration expanded the criteria to include receipt of Medicaid, housing assistance, and food stamps. Upon

taking office, Biden promptly canceled this expansion, preferring to admit more immigrants who will use those programs.

Although illegal immigrants have largely the same labor-market impact as similarly skilled legal immigrants, some important fiscal differences exist. The most salient is that illegal immigrants cannot collect Social Security and Medicare benefits, but roughly half do contribute taxes toward those programs. These “free” contributions are an unambiguous benefit for natives, but they are also a ticking time bomb of sorts. Each surge of illegal immigration generates calls for amnesty, and since amnesty confers eligibility for benefits, the “free” contributions would turn into a net cost to taxpayers of over \$1 trillion.

Once again, the economic tradeoffs inherent to immigration policy are real. A full accounting of costs and benefits needs to be part of the political process that establishes a sound immigration policy. Unfortunately, the political process cannot operate as long as the border remains unsecured. Americans have the right to decide how many and which types of people enter their country each year, but illegal immigration takes that decision out of their hands. ❧

TECHNICALLY RIGHT



The Death of Technocracy

The “follow the Science” approach once lauded by many blue-state governors has been shattered in a collision with reality.

by Matt Shapiro

As we ride into the summer, I'm delighted to see that we're looking at the COVID-19 pandemic largely in the rear-view mirror, swinging our tequila bottles above the windshield of our national cherry-red convertible as we drive into the future, speeding toward the border where we finally can be unconcerned with masks or unexpected school closures.

I've been a bit surprised at how quickly things go back to normal when people decide they should. And honestly, I want nothing more than never to give a single thought to this crisis ever again. But, as the danger of the COVID pandemic has receded, a noteworthy trend has emerged: the high-handed rhetoric around “following the Science” that was particularly dominant among a few nationally lauded leaders in the early days of this crisis has been abandoned. We must look back to find out why this is, because it tells us something extremely valuable about our leaders, our national culture, and the future of governance. The “party of Science” has quietly abandoned its appeal to science.

There is a theory of governance that is crudely labeled “technocratic.” This is a vision of a ruling class in which the experts of a given field directly command the levers of policy. When Michigan's Gretchen Whitmer says, “I have made decisions based on science and facts,” when California's Gavin Newsom says, “SCIENCE — not politics — must be California's guide,” when Jay Inslee says, “We trust science in Washington,” these governors are claiming that they are not ruling as leaders in their own right but as a conduit for the wisdom of the experts. In the case of the COVID pandemic response, this is a claim that they will do what the experts tell them in order to save lives and guide the actions of the citizenry. It is a promise to submit their own leadership instincts and the desires of their citizens to a panel of experts for review.

Technocracy is a seductive governance strategy because it combines the simplicity of asking your mom if you're allowed to go outside with a reliance on a class of people who are supposedly devoted to apolitical objectivity. The technocratic approach promises that having a red or blue governor wouldn't matter because the leader is listening to experts who, given their objectivity, would all come to the same policy conclusions. During the pandemic, those conclusions were not to be based on polls or the whims of the democratic rabble but on the mechanics of how a virus spreads. The goal in all this is an objective and scientific one: to keep infection rates as low as possible.

In the first few months of the pandemic, the technocratic approach seemed like the obvious solution. With people scrambling to figure out how to stop the virus from spreading, scientists had answers. They had metrics like the R0 (pronounced “are-naught”), a value to gauge viral spread; they provided testing targets for opening back up; they gave us detailed



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phased reopening plans that were hundreds of pages long. They provided far more material than could be digested by an individual, and they were consulted daily by heads of state for their guidance.

But as the shock of the first few months faded, more questions arose about the details of this science-driven approach. As the summer of 2020 wore on, it became clear that the response favored by many public policy experts was an abundance of caution that translated poorly to the real world. For months, Washington state's formal guidance for gradual reopening required such a low threshold of new COVID cases that it became clear we would never dip below that number and thus never advance to the next phase. Across the country, reopening preconditions made little sense. Metrics were poorly thought out and poorly communicated.

Herein lies one of the greatest faults of the technocratic approach: It presumes that policy is a series of knobs. Technocrats assume that when these knobs are turned from, say, 3 to 7, we should see recognizable differences in the results. Thus we should be able to twist the knobs on masks, remote work, in-classroom instruction versus virtual instruction, restaurants, public gatherings, and religious gatherings and watch COVID case numbers go up or down in response.

But back in reality, this is not how any of this works. Public policy mitigations are often buried in large documents, filled with details and caveats that are not only difficult to follow but also change constantly, leaving individuals and businesses wondering what a given policy is on a given day. Some states made a big deal out of moving from 25 percent capacity for indoor dining to 50 percent, as if this were a consequential action. Instead, it was a distinction with effects so small as to be unmeasurable — and yet Washington state stripped a bar of its liquor license for violating this distinction.

Even if there were a clear strategy for applying these restrictions, there is no such thing as politics-free health policy. In a now-infamous and gut-wrenching video, the owner of the Pineapple Hill Saloon in California showed how the state not only shut her restaurant down but also took over her parking lot to give space to a politically connected movie studio so they could feed their crew in exactly the same space where she was forbidden to serve. It became clear that there was no objective anti-virus strategy in place; it was all a blanket suppressive action that allowed favored political actors an exemption. This was reiterated in the early fight over vaccine access as large companies and industry advocates jockeyed for position to have their workers classified as “essential” so they might move up the vaccination queue.

There is a saying on public health communication that “You have about five words.” This is a way of expressing the fact that people can't digest a wide range of public health information at scale. The technocratic approach relied on a phone book of regulations applied to each industry across a four-phase reopening approach with exemptions and carveouts for businesses and industries with the political clout to plead their case to the authorities.

This would all be excusable if we saw clear results from technocratic governance. Instead, we don't see any meaningful difference in either case surges or death rates from states with governors who insist they are listening to “the Science” and states with governors who are clearly eager to remove restrictions and return to normal. There is no difference in COVID rates between districts with closed schools and open ones. Capacity restrictions on restaurants and religious gatherings did not deliver better results to those states during the winter surges. A study published in *Science* magazine found that the only mitigation

strategy that produced any clear, positive effect in COVID rates in schoolchildren was a daily symptom screen. Every other response recommended by public health departments and the CDC resulted in either no effect or an *increase* in COVID rates.

The only benefit that the technocratic approach truly delivers is allowing a leader to say, “It's not my fault; I'm listening to the Science.” This abdication of responsibility and appeal to a higher power is what makes this approach so attractive for politicians. Several governors embraced this strategy and immediately proclaimed their moral and intellectual superiority while claiming that, regarding policy, their hands were tied by the Science and the metrics.

Despite all the pitfalls of the technocratic strategy, the contrasting leadership approach is not to toss all science aside and ignore the experts. Instead, it is for leaders to act as mediators between expert opinion, the needs of citizens and businesses, and the will of the people. These are fine lines, and they're ones that Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis has walked since early in the pandemic.

DeSantis's pandemic response strategy has been remarkable and provides an exemplary contrast to that of governors who fell for the technocratic approach. In line with the “five words” advice on public health, most of his policies can be summarized in a sentence or two. When the virus first broke out in early 2020, Florida worked to protect nursing homes and long-term care facilities. After the initial wave of lockdowns, DeSantis's policies were designed to promote stability for people and businesses while allowing some degree of local control. This meant encouraging individual caution while allowing businesses room to operate.

When DeSantis lifted restrictions on restaurants, he left in place the ability for local municipalities and counties to institute their own mask mandates or dining capacity restrictions up to 50 percent without any state interference. Many counties did just that, including the very blue Miami-Dade County, where the residents preferred to have tighter restrictions. But the policy was a promise to businesses that they would not suddenly be shut down again. It was a promise of stability when stability was very much needed.

This strategy of clarity and simplicity over technocratic knob-fiddling carried over into vaccine distribution. In the “listen to the Science” states, lengthy documents explained how vaccines would be distributed, in what phases, and to which people. In my home state of Washington, we had an eighteen-page form that was a maze of potential eligibility guidelines. One question on that form was, “Are you a critical worker according to the Washington Critical Infrastructure Worker list?” To answer that, one would click on a link to another document that was itself fourteen pages long defining critical infrastructure across a dozen industries.

Florida's strategy was this: vaccinate seniors. For the first two months of vaccine availability, the only requirement was that all seniors were eligible. Then, in late March, there was one week that everyone over age forty could be vaccinated. After that, anyone of any age who wanted a vaccine was eligible. It was as simple as that.

But for all the successes and beneficial policies implemented in Florida, the real vindication of DeSantis's strategy has been the “we believe in Science” governors quietly abandoning rule-by-metric and rule-by-expert governance in favor of DeSantis-style leadership.

In late March, Washington Gov. Jay Inslee abandoned the CDC guidelines for reopening schools and simply told school districts that

they must reopen for in-person instruction. No metrics were given, no excuses were made, and no experts were referenced. He simply invoked his emergency powers to override the school districts and teachers unions and told them they would open by April 19, end of discussion. And they did. There was complaining and scrambling among the school boards in the state, but in the end every school district opened back up in accordance with the dictates of the governor and in defiance of the formal CDC guidelines.

A few weeks later, as the state of Michigan was experiencing a late-spring surge of COVID cases, Gov. Gretchen Whitmer publicly rejected the policy recommendations of her expert advisers. Seeing the surge, the experts recommended yet again shutting down restaurants, youth sports, and high schools. Whitmer replied that “policy changes won't reduce the spread” and rejected their recommendations. She

made it very clear that she would not implement any further orders, mandates, or requirements, but would simply recommend caution among the unvaccinated and high risk.

In the space of a year, Whitmer went from loudly proclaiming her deference to experts and her determination to “make decisions based on science” to quietly mimicking DeSantis's leadership. The rhetoric of technocracy remains intact in some places, but the strategy has been abandoned in favor of a stability that is achieved only when leaders press for the freedom of their constituents to make their own choices and manage their own risk.

This does not mean that the rhetoric of technocracy is dead. But we should remember its failures wherever it rears its head. We should remind our elected officials that their experiment in expert-rule was a failure and antithetical to the spirit of our country. 🐼

SUDOKU

by Davis Fridley

Fill each cell in the grid with a digit from 1 to 9 such that digits do not repeat in a row, column, or outlined 3x3 box. Dashed cages are also given in the grid. The digits placed in a cage must sum to the total given in the top-left corner of the cage, and digits cannot repeat within a cage. For example, a cage that is three cells in size and is marked with a 20 must contain three different digits that add to 20, such as 3+8+9 or 5+7+8.

Enjoy!

3						23		
		20				15		8
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Solution on page 49



China Will Win Only if America Allows It

Another American Century, if you can keep it.

by John Jiang

In December 2009, the Global Language Monitor, a language-tracking company based in the U.S., declared that the “Rise of China” was the single biggest news story of that past decade. At the time, China’s GDP was barely over \$5 trillion, and it had yet to overtake Japan as the world’s second-largest economy.

More than a decade on, Chinese nominal GDP stands at nearly \$17 trillion. The nation has established itself as the cornerstone of almost every major global supply chain and is beginning to accumulate military capital at an eye-popping rate.

Wariness of China in Washington has gone from fringe to universal in a couple of years. For all of his repudiation of his predecessor, President Biden has largely retained Donald Trump’s rhetorical emphasis on China as an ambitious adversary (policy action, which will be discussed in more detail later, is a different story altogether). Biden has acknowledged the obvious fact that China wishes to supplant U.S. dominance, and he has taken pains to portray himself as a tough negotiator against Xi Jinping.

It’s not just Joe Biden or the Washington policy circuit that believes China has, in some sense, arrived. The roasting of Secretary of State Antony Blinken in the March U.S.–China talks in Alaska is evidence that Chinese leaders have become confident, even boisterous, in their perceived position of parity with the United States. Blinken’s timid response to a humiliating sixteen-minute lecture by top Communist Party Diplomat Yang Jiechi did little to dissuade the projected image of Chinese power.

Surveys also point toward a sea change in perceptions of relative status. An October 2020 poll by Pew Research found that, even as views of China turned sharply unfavorable during the unfolding of the pandemic, a strong plurality of people in the developed world now see China as the world’s leading economic power.

Yet the 2020s will almost certainly prove to be an immensely challenging decade for the world’s most populous country. Even as it continues to grow in nominal strength, a combination of demography, overreach, and systemic economic flaws could conspire to stop China’s rise.

Against this backdrop, the Biden–Harris administration is sure to flounder in its attempts to form a coherent strategy on China. Blinken’s framing of Beijing as an all-in-one “competitor, collaborator, and adversary” has set the tone for a policy approach characterized by indecisiveness and confused priorities.



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The self-defeating philosophy of America’s leaders, rather than Chinese competence, may be China’s best shot at preeminent status during this decade.

Sinotriumphalists and Sinoskeptics

Rarely in history does any geopolitical commentator have the privilege, enjoyed by Sinologists and China watchers today, of witnessing an aspiring empire grow in real time and at such an unprecedented rate. Naturally, the question of China’s near-future trajectory has spawned endless pages of expert speculation, much of it radically divergent.

On the one hand, there is the prevailing school of thought that is broadly confident about China’s continued growth in wealth and stature. Perhaps unintuitively, this faction is deeply divided in terms of actual warmth toward China or its ruling regime: it encompasses relatively pro-China academics and sources such as Kishore Mahbubani and Martin Jacques, staid China Watch journals like the *Economist* and the *Diplomat*, and American patriots like Tucker Carlson and Robert Spalding, who have built followings for sounding the alarm every other day on the Communist Party’s machinations.

The otherwise irreconcilable members of this camp are united by a general acceptance of the mainstream view that China has achieved or nearly achieved peer competitor status with the U.S., that it is becoming stronger still, and that it will soon bring down or radically reshape the U.S.-led global order of the post–Cold War period, barring a massive blunder or a change in U.S. posture.

This China-bullish view is the predominant one in American discourse, and for good reason: it seems to be the best interpretation of the best indicators. GDP growth, military capital growth, and infrastructure investment are among the key metrics in which China has either surpassed the U.S. or is on track to do so within the next decade.

Projects such as the Belt and Road Initiative and Made in China 2025, though more like branding exercises than truly coherent grand strategies, have managed to wow many foreign observers. The country is also making strides in innovation and research, an area that has traditionally been considered its Achilles’ heel. After controlling for the huge numbers of fraudulent or junk Chinese scientific papers, the Nature Index found that by 2020, China had achieved top-quality research output equivalent to about 70 percent of the U.S.’s own output, placing it well ahead of third-place Germany.

Given these datapoints, as well as the prevalence of China-bullish dogma across the political spectrum, contrarian voices are hard to find.

Nonetheless, they do exist. These China bears — we’ll call them “Sinoskeptics” — believe that Chinese power is overhyped and unsustainable or even outright illusionary.

The most (in)famous Sinoskeptic is, without a doubt, lawyer and author Gordon Chang. He is best known for his 2001 book *The Coming Collapse of China*, which argues that a combination of bad debt and the shock of foreign competition (China was

then on the verge of becoming a member of the World Trade Organization) would cause the country and its regime to implode within ten years.

The book raised many interesting criticisms of the weaknesses of China’s economic model, and some of its key points — particularly regarding debt and inefficient state enterprises — are still in play today. Of course, it also utterly failed in its prediction of a collapse. When 2011 came and went without a Chinese implosion accompanying it, Chang wrote a follow-up article asserting that the much-anticipated collapse would occur in 2012. Although that deadline also expired uneventfully, Chang has remained a Sinoskeptic, albeit one who is noticeably less enthusiastic about providing exact dates.

Chang’s diminished credibility has opened the way for many other writers to take on the collapsitarianist mantle. The most high-profile of these is probably Peter Zeihan. A former vice president of the leading geopolitical research group Stratfor,

Zeihan has written three books that collectively argue that the world’s countries (and especially China) are entirely at the mercy of American foreign policy.

A Reckoning on the Horizon

In his first and best-known work, *The Accidental Superpower* (2014), Zeihan makes the case that the “long peace” of the post–Second World War period is an aberration that persists exclusively because of

America’s combination of naval supremacy and internationalist foreign policy. China, too, is an aberration; it is a unified nation and not a bunch of squabbling kingdoms (supposedly its natural state) only because America chooses to actively keep it together.

Zeihan points to China’s rapidly aging population, its challenging geography, and its dependence on massive food and energy imports as the country’s insurmountable weaknesses. Should the U.S. ever decide to stop protecting the world’s sea lanes, Zeihan predicts the immediate return of interstate and nonstate piracy, the collapse of the global system, the subsequent drying up of the imports that China needs to survive, and therefore the inevitable collapse of China as a unified polity.

The U.S., on the other hand, is going to be just fine in Zeihan’s model. Indeed, he expects it to be the only great power (not just superpower) left by 2030. His follow-up books *The Absent Superpower* (2016) and *Disunited Nations* (2020) stress that the U.S.’s effective energy independence as of the late 2010s has eliminated the last reason that American policymakers had to engage with the rest of the world.

Zeihan predicts that the U.S., with its abundant natural resources, the world’s best farmland, a near-perfect navigable river network in the form of the Mississippi River System, and two oceans to protect it from any outside threat, will retreat into isolationism beginning in this decade, dooming almost every other country.

Though certainly exhilarating, Zeihan’s model has its share of flaws. For instance, a proclivity toward geographical determinism frequently blinds him to the decisive, and growing, role of technology. The fact that China possesses a fifth of the world’s population but only about 10 percent of its arable land —

Though the resilience of the Chinese economy has so far defied the likes of Chang and Zeihan, the Communist Party can only put off the structural flaws that they point to for so long.



historically a primary cause of cycles of civil conflict and famine — looks like less of a problem once advanced greenhouse and vertical farming technologies are factored in.

Specific arguments aside, the greatest shadow over Zeihan's credibility has been his own minor case of Gordon Chang Syndrome. While working for Stratfor, Zeihan co-authored the group's 2005 and 2010 decade forecasts, in both cases predicting that China would suffer a Japan-style economic meltdown and collapse by 2015 at the latest. In 2011, he followed up with a talk in which he claimed that the Chinese system would last only for another "three to five years."

At the beginning of last year, Zeihan asserted a new deadline of 2030 for China's collapse; four months later, he wrote a newsletter titled "The Beginning of the End of China," in which he predicted that the pandemic-driven depression of Chinese exports would continue (in fact, exports and GDP growth rebounded almost immediately.)

But though the resilience of the Chinese economy has so far defied the likes of Chang and Zeihan, the Communist Party can put off the structural flaws that they point to only for so long. In particular, China's addiction to debt-fueled growth combined with its approaching demographic problem may culminate in a period of Japan-style forced deleveraging

and stagnation sometime in the next two decades. An outright collapse is possible, but implausible — though putting it that way is unlikely to sell many books.

Another American Century, If You Can Keep It

The fact of China's current middling per-capita wealth, together with its expected future problems, suggests that it is in fact unlikely to pose a serious threat to America's superpower status in the decades to come.

Among the authors who predict continued American hegemony is the great power competition expert Michael Beckley. His 2018 book *Unrivaled* argues forcefully that China's economic clout is largely illusory and that its perception in the American press is a consequence of overemphasis on the wrong metrics. It was released to a lot less fanfare than any of Zeihan's works, but it has received steady play in the press, including a recent review by David Frum of the *Atlantic*.

True clout comes not from *gross* output but *net* output, Beckley argues. A country with twice as many citizens who produce half as much per person as its rival is not equally as powerful, since the burden of feeding, pensioning, educating, surveilling, and policing all those extra people cuts into net output and makes retaining and concentrating wealth much more difficult.

Consequently, the top-line figure that forms the staple of almost all commentary on Chinese growth — the country's GDP — is misleading. Beckley proposes a formula to replace it as a measure of national power: GDP multiplied by GDP per capita, adjusted for purchasing power. As of 2021, this metric suggests that China's net economic clout, far from being on par with the U.S., is only about one-third its size.

The formula is nowhere near perfect, of course; it seems a bit arbitrary, and Beckley himself concedes that it is a "primitive proxy." Still, it is a good first effort to capture the fact, played out repeatedly throughout history, that large and poor states often lose to small and wealthy ones.

An appropriate example of this phenomenon is the First Sino-Japanese War, which ended with the humiliated Qing Empire ceding both Korea and Taiwan to Japan. Going by GDP alone, the Qing should have been almost twice as strong as Japan. But Beckley's formula suggests that Japan entered the war with a three-to-one net economic power advantage over the Qing — roughly the same advantage that the U.S. enjoys today.

Based on projections of future GDP and population numbers by the International Monetary Fund and the UN, China might peak at half of America's net economic power by the middle of this century, after which its declining population will cause the gap to widen again. If Beckley's model is even approximately true, then China will never represent a great power threat comparable to even the crumbling final years of the Soviet Union.

Don't Surrender the Second Cold War

The central question of the twenty-first century will not be whether America will have its hegemonic status forcefully taken from it. Rather, it will be whether America will voluntarily relinquish its status through folly, exhaustion, or self-loathing.

In a 2019 interview discussing his book, Beckley states that "internal decay" may erode U.S. power independently of any changes in the international situation. Possible eroders include "partisan divisions," "special interests," rising "cultural tensions," and the decline of social mobility.

With the Biden administration in power and ideologues firmly entrenched in every major American corporation and institution, expect to see ever more decay around you. Indeed, America's elite seem to be doing their best to throw in the towel against China.

How could this happen, and why? Woke politics has emerged from the fringes to become the best example of American institutional decay in the past five years. A few of its consequences are military recruitment ads focusing on LGBTQ causes instead of national defense, loosened entry requirements at colleges, restricted access to advanced classes in the name of equity, proposals for defunding the police, and political censorship at leading scientific journals, among countless other examples.

It is difficult to gauge how much material damage is being caused to America by the wokeification of everything. Nonetheless, the above examples serve to showcase the utterly

self-defeating mindset of the liberal elite: they no longer *want* to win. They're focused elsewhere, on internal crises often of their own devising. The armed forces, police, schools, corporations, science, and the family unit are all sacrifices to the undefined and insatiable goal of "equity."

China's leaders know that America's current ideological fervor is self-defeating. That's why they're funding it: CCP-aligned groups in the U.S., such as the Chinese Progressive Association, help to fundraise for Black Lives Matter.

"Self-defeating" is also a suitable descriptor for the Biden administration's policy agenda, much of which is ostensibly geared toward outcompeting China.

As discussed above, one of the United States's primary assets in the twenty-first century will be its phenomenal fossil fuel reserves. In contrast, one of China's weaknesses will be its dependence on energy imports. Knowing this dynamic, a capable strategist would want to play into America's strength, maintaining a self-sufficient fossil fuel economy while pulling back from guaranteeing the supply lines on which China relies.

Instead, the Biden administration has committed to assisting China's "clean energy" strategy by mandating a shift away from fossil fuels and toward electric vehicles and wind and solar energy sources. This plays into China's strength: the country dominates the clean energy supply chain and would directly or indirectly profit from American purchases. American investment in the advancement of green energy technology would also accelerate

Beijing's plans of ending its reliance on oil inputs through pivoting to coal and renewables.

One of the claims Peter Zeihan makes in *The Accidental Superpower* is that China is due to split along provincial lines as popular faith in the government erodes and the Han super-ethnicity begins to break back down into its constituent sub-ethnicities. In truth, however, it appears that nationalistic fervor has only increased in the wake of the pandemic.

The racial and political divides that Zeihan anticipated in China seem increasingly applicable to America instead. At the very least, those in power are doing their best to sow division and strife along racial, sexual, and political lines.

The Democratic Party is doing all that it can to fan these partisan tensions. After a year of Black Lives Matter-supported rioting while Democrats looked the other way, Biden's Justice Department is moving to label Trump supporters as "domestic terrorists." This intensification of mutual suspicion can only hurt the country.

Truth be told, America will probably dominate the twenty-first century regardless of any blunders, bad legislation, military misadventures, or Chinese aggression. Its wealth is enormous, its geographical assets are unmatched, and it is home to some of the most ingenious and enterprising people in the world.

But none of this will matter if the U.S. becomes unrecognizable — if it devolves into tyranny or a bunch of irreconcilable tribes. The question of the Second Cold War is therefore not whether America can win, but whether it wants to. ❧

"Self-defeating" is a suitable descriptor for the Biden administration's policy agenda, much of which is ostensibly geared toward outcompeting China.



China's Spectral State

A nightmare.

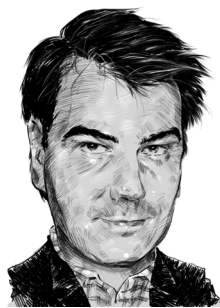
by Matthew Omolesky

Yunnan, 1914

It is summertime in the lush hill country of southwestern China, and the air is suffused with a damp mist and with the discordant songs of cicadas and laughing-thrushes. Here, in this teeming, preternatural paradise, we encounter the *Mission archéologique Segalen-Voisins-Lartigue* as it wends its way through the chasmic intermontane valleys and verdant terraced hillsides of Yunnan province, cataloguing at every opportunity the mausolea, tumuli, and other ancient monuments that have for centuries lain half-buried in the undergrowth. With the aid of their guides and porters, the three Frenchmen after whom the expedition is named — Victor Segalen, Gilbert de Voisins, and Jean Lartigue, all students of the celebrated Sinologist Emmanuel-Édouard Chavannes — painstakingly ascend from tropical to subtropical to alpine zones, traversing the broad strips of moss-cloaked forest that separate what the aboriginal Hani people of the Ailao Mountains distinguish as the “human space” and the “ghost space.” Victor Segalen has no qualms about delving into this spectral realm, pregnant with history. Indeed the very point of his journey, as he will later recount in his epic travelogue *Équipée: Pékin aux marches tibétaines*, published posthumously in 1929, is to survey the literal and symbolic terrain that “divides into two polar opposites: what has been done. And what is to come.”

If we are to make any progress in understanding the age-old Chinese confrontation between tradition and modernity, between the dead and the living, between the shades that haunt the Chinese *dìyu*, or “earth-prison,” and the exorcists, well-meaning or otherwise, who seek to banish the ghosts of the past, we would do well to fall in behind Segalen as he plunges ever deeper into the unknown.

It was at one crucial juncture of that expedition, in a locale nestled against the steep slope of an obscure Yunnan valley, that Segalen chanced to find himself walking along the dividing line between what has been done and what is to come. The archaeologist had been strolling through the Village of the White Salt Mines, a “great market town,” and then down a “mossy, dead road that no one seems to take anymore,” when he met a party of graybeards coiffed in Ming-era chignons instead of Manchu-style braided queues and wearing skirted, flowing robes instead of plain-sewn Ch’ing-era *changshans*. “These people,” Segalen marveled, “are from another era . . . living as though it were three hundred years back in time,” with their “drawn-out Ming gestures, the style and ancestral bearing that goes back six or seven generations to the old Ming dynasty. Gestures that were long ago captured, glazed and fired onto Ming porcelain.” Surrounded by these living fossils, the Frenchman was told that he had stumbled upon Hei-yen-ch’ang, the “Ancient Town of Black Salt Pits,” an “elusive sub-prefecture the history books declared was destroyed in ages past,” a sort of long-lost *yīn* to the modern village’s mundane *yáng*. Segalen had run across this mysterious place previously, albeit in a dusty tome



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that alluded to a town said to “have fallen” and to “no longer exist,” its “prefectural rank downgraded, the city destroyed by order.” The elderly gentlemen arrayed before Segalen existed all the same; they were, by all appearances, descendants of the quixotic generalissimo Wu San-kuei, self-proclaimed emperor of the “Great Zhou Dynasty,” the “King Who Pacifies the West,” and the strongman best known for a foolhardy rebellion against his Ch’ing masters. Wu had perished back in 1678, his cadaver torn into strips and scattered to the four winds by a vengeful K’ang-hsi Emperor. Wu’s heirs, it would seem, had secreted themselves rather more securely in the rugged hills of Yunnan.

Segalen knew to tread lightly, familiar as he was with the Ch’in-era poet T’ao Yüan-ming’s beloved story “The Peach Blossom Spring,” which told the story of a Wu-ling fisherman who, like the French scholar, came upon a hidden settlement where “imposing buildings stood among rich fields and pleasant ponds all set with mulberry and willow,” where “the air was filled with drifting peachbloom,” and where “white-haired elders and tufted children alike were cheerful and contented.” The enigmatic inhabitants of the spring explained how their forebears, “fleeing from the troubles of the age of Ch’in, had come with their wives and neighbors to this isolated place, never to leave it. From that time on they had been cut off from the outside world. They asked what age was this: they had never even heard of the Han, let alone its successors the Wei and the Chin.” The astounding story ended with a stern admonition: “Do not speak of us to the people outside.” To do so would inevitably prove fatal to the community’s blissful repose, and to its very survival. Segalen intuitively understood that the denizens of Hei-yen-ch’ang must likewise be shielded from the knowledge that their culture had, unbeknownst to them, been cruelly disfeatured, subjected by the invading Manchu to the same abuse as the carcass of Wu San-kuei, and that now

every man in the Empire today is subjugated, forced to let his hair grow down to his ankles! And they would know that all the others had had their throats slit. They would know that their right to live has expired, that their lifestyle is invalid, that their city, once proclaimed in law, is now declassified, no longer legally exists, is no longer considered necessary. Perhaps these gentle, trembling old men would crumble into dust at my feet.

As an archaeologist and a medical doctor by training, Segalen was mindful of the fragility of cultures and individuals in an inhospitable world, and of the ineluctability of decay and destruction in this vale of earthly life. In his 1912 poem “To the Ten Thousand Years,” he lamented how “nothing stationary escapes the hungry teeth of time,” but trusted that “the immutable dwells not within your walls, but in you, the slow men, the continuous men,” men like the mysterious elders of Hei-yen-ch’ang.

And so Segalen beat a hasty retreat, leaving the people of the Ancient Town of Black Salt Pits to their devices. He told his colleagues that his encounter had merely been “a dream of the walk, a dream of the road, as I slumber on two lolling feet, drunk with fatigue, at the end of this stage of my journey.” So Segalen’s story was either a reverie brought on by over-exhaustion, an antiquarian’s fever dream, or it was a brush with the supernatural, like so many in Chinese literature (visits by envoys from the Country of Drifting Ghosts, shopping trips to midnight spectral markets by the sea margin, and other vignettes that fill such spine-chilling collections as Feng Menglong’s *Stories to Caution the World* or Pu Singling’s *Strange Tales from a Chinese Studio*). In any event, Segalen had conjured up a tale worthy of T’ao Yüan-ming, and though he could be accused of toying with his readers, it had been with a definite purpose in mind. The people of the Ancient Town of Black Salt Pits did exist, though their polity was downgraded and destroyed by the merciless K’ang-hsi Emperor. Is the name really all



Tradition and Modernity, 2021 (Bill Wilson Studio)

that remains? Or is there something more we can still glean from the ghostly utterances of the men of Hei-yen-ch’ang? Their voices, thin and reedy though they may be after all those years lost in the wilderness, still carry over the hills of Yunnan.

Peking, 1949

It is thirty-five years later, and much has changed in the span of a mere generation. Victor Segalen is dead; the last emperor, Puyi, has been ejected from the Forbidden City; the Ancient Town of Black Salt Pits has again succumbed to obscurity; and the Chinese Communist Revolution has been unleashed. The deprivations of the Ch’in or Ch’ing will pale in comparison with the enormities to come. “Nothing collapses more quickly than civilization during crises,” wrote Charles Augustin Sainte-Beuve, and “lost in three weeks is the accomplishment of centuries. Civilization, life itself, is something learned and invented . . . After several years of peace men forget it all too easily. They come to believe that *culture* is innate, that it is identical with *nature*. But savagery is always lurking two steps away, and it regains a foothold as soon as one stumbles.” Victor Segalen appreciated just how quickly a fire stoked for centuries could be snuffed out in an instant, as did another western Sinophile, the American David Kidd, author of *Peking Story: The Last Days of Old China*, who memorably described the sad end met by a collection of bronze incense burners once possessed by the Ming Dynasty’s Hsüan Te Emperor, a poignant reminder of the tragedy of cultural genocide.

When Kidd and his Chinese wife, Aimee, moved into the Yu family mansion in Peking in that fateful year of 1949, they found the building’s Eastern Study crammed full of precious artifacts ranging from silver fingernail guards and gold-filigreed snuff jars to black lacquer zithers and rosebud-painted spittoons. None of the curios, however, possessed even a fraction of the value of the seventeen bronze incense burners proudly displayed therein. As Aimee explained, it was during in the reign of the Hsüan Te Emperor that “one of the palace buildings, in which were many gold images, burned to the ground. The building was a complete loss, its smoking ruins later yielding up only numerous lumps of melted gold.” By sheer happenstance a tribute from Burma had arrived at that very moment, providing a windfall of red copper, and then another shipment from Turkestan, laden with ground rubies, followed suit. One of Hsüan Te’s officials, sensing a certain serendipity, counseled that all was not lost. “May it please your Majesty,” the mandarin said,

gold is no more or less valuable than its market price. Copper ore, unrefined, is no better than the common soil with which the empire abounds. Even

ground rubies, although of some medicinal value, can be put to use only occasionally. However, mixed together by the alchemist's art, and combined with various other substances that are also plentiful and at hand, bronze objects of unexcelled beauty can be created. As there is no greater evidence of virtue than the proper observance of rites and ceremonies, and as the palace is at the moment in great need of incense burners, I take my life in my hands and tremblingly suggest that Your Majesty order the most skilled artisans to produce incense burners with these ingredients.

The resulting *objets d'art* were “each more beautiful than the last.” Some were red, others “speckled with iridescent green or with twinkling bits of ruby or gold”; one “had a smooth gold surface, incredibly bright and shining.” But the value of the Ming-era burners went far beyond mere aesthetics.

Kidd was astonished to discover that these incense pots, forged in the fifteenth century, had never completely cooled. Hard as it may be to believe, thousands of minuscule bricks of charcoal, one after the other, had been kept smoldering for five centuries, filling the rooms of the imperial palace, and then the Yu mansion, with an intoxicating scent. When Aimee produced a burner from the cabinet, one “of exquisite shape, but of a dull, brassy color,” she demonstrated how “once the burner is allowed to grow entirely cold, the color fades and no later heat can bring it back.” The effect of this revelation on Kidd was profound, all the more so given the presence of iconoclastic communists just outside the mansion gates. It was a *memento mori* of sorts:

The cold, empty-bellied little incense pot seemed tragic to me. Because I knew what it must have been like when it was alive, I could see that it was dead, and I was able to understand for the first time that the rooms in which I lived, the tiny ivory shovel, the porcelain wine cups, and the silk-stringed harp were dead as well. Never having seen them alive, I had failed to see that this was so.

Within a matter of days, a vindictive servant doused the burners with water, leaving the pots “the color of a brass doorknob.” Aimee was “completely demoralized,” and Kidd himself was “staggered ... not only at the thought of the beauty that had been destroyed but at the idea of five centuries of tending and firing wiped out in the space of seconds. The incense burners were no longer an anachronism in these rooms. The last illusion of a link with the past had been broken, and all the emperor's horses and all the emperor's men couldn't put the old China together again.” The symbolism was almost too on the nose — a somber end to the dazzling glories of imperial China, a harbinger of the brutal oppression that would attend Mao's Great Leap Forward and Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution, and a stark lesson in the constancy of impermanence. The endless struggle sessions, purges, religious persecutions, ransacked museums and manor houses, environmental catastrophes, and tens of millions of corpses made the same point, though on a far more ruinous scale.

Yunnan, 1959

Ten years on, and the Great Leap Forward has arrived at the isolated village of Zhizuo. The local communist party committee has launched the “Sputnik Field Movement,” named after the Soviet satellite and designed to “destroy superstition, create miracles, and release the suppression of sputniks throughout the land,” whatever that meant. A local informant by the name of Li Zhilin later asked the anthropologist Erik Mueggler, who was studying the indigenous Yi people of the Baicaolin Mountains, “Why did working all day and all night produce so little food?” Li answered his own question: “It was to produce words.” Mueggler interpreted this to mean that “the state was an empty mouth crying out in hunger for words and grain,

driving men and women to labor ceaselessly to satisfy its exacting and mutable palate. It was a spectral state.” Superstition, if you insist on calling it that, was not destroyed but reinforced. The regime, shocked by the tenacity with which people clung to the old ways, redoubled its efforts against political, cultural, and religious conservatives, deriding them as *ningui sheshen*, “cow monsters and snake demons,” or as devils, vampires, monsters, and apparitions. “Mao Zedong Thought” was termed a *zhaoyao jing*, a “demon-exposing mirror.” Villagers, meanwhile, cleverly learned to distinguish between so-called black *gu*, “wild ghost officials,” and white *gu*, “wild ghost victims.”

Another of Mueggler's informants, Li Wenyi, explained how “the black *gu* are sent down from the sky. They are wild ghost officials who kill live, healthy people, destroying them with hunger or suicide. Their victims are the white *gu*. These are ordinary wild ghosts who wander the earth with no power to kill; they afflict with illness, but they don't kill. When you speak to them, you address first the black *gu*, then the white *gu*, one after another.” Such beliefs understandably flourished in places like Chezò village, where during the Great Leap Forward seventy-five of the six hundred residents starved to death, and others languished in forced labor camps, while the Party cadres notoriously “ate meat, eggs, and honey.” Those who died were condemned to “wander the fields and paths; they waylay their descendants and demand gifts of grain and meat; they are always starving, always greedy. These days we perform exorcism after exorcism, far more than ever before. But few exorcisms are successful for long; those ghosts keep coming back, and their descendants keep falling ill. That is why some call this the age of wild ghosts” — a fitting name for our epoch.

The Cultural Revolution came to a nominal end in 1976, but the campaign of cultural destruction never really stopped. Consider the fate of a modern-day “Peach Blossom Source,” located near the confluence of the Zhangjiang and Gongjiang rivers in China's southeastern province of Jiangxi, where lies the island of Taohua, or “Peach Blossom.” Part of the Dahu River Water Golden Tourism Course, the islet is a popular sight-seeing destination, particularly when the orchards are in bloom, providing a hint of what T'ao Yüan-ming's hidden spring might have looked like in its prime. The nearby Taohua village, clinging to the banks of the Minjiang River, is a humble hamlet, inhabited by refugees from the Wan'an hydropower station reservoir project. Back in 2017, these villagers, in an outpouring of filial piety, cobbled together around one million *renminbi* (around \$140,000) to be put towards refurbishing the ancestral hall of the Luo clan. Within three years, this charming traditional hall, with its gleaming white walls and multi-inclined vermilion roof, would be gratuitously torn down by local communist authorities.

Early in the morning of May 1, 2020, as reported by the online magazine Bitter Winter, “Over 300 police officers in dozens of vehicles were dispatched to Taohua village,” where “they cordoned off two roads leading to the hall, preventing anyone from approaching to prevent the demolitions, and blocked communication signals in the village. In a few hours, the building was leveled to the ground.” Other ancestral halls, including the Cai clan hall in Ningbo city and the ancestral hall in Yantai, have been spared outright destruction only by their conversion into propaganda bases. “The government demanded to convert the ancestral hall into an exhibition center promoting the Communist Party, or it would be shut down,” one Yantai local complained. “This used to be a place to remember ancestors, but the government ordered Party members from surrounding villages and institutions to study there. This is controlling people's thoughts.”

“Of all the human soul's needs,” Simone Weil argued, “none is more vital than ... the past.” But the past is now being systematically eradicated all across China. In Xinjiang, mosques are demolished and provocatively replaced by public toilets; in

southern Mongolia, students are forbidden from learning their traditional script; in Henan province, the four-faced Guanyin statue atop Qingfeng Mountain, built in 2012 to replace a predecessor lost to the Cultural Revolution, came tumbling down once again in April 2020; and in Shanxi province, the Shrine of Our Lady of Seven Sorrows was knocked down in the autumn of 2019 because “it had too many crosses and statues.” These are but a few examples, which must be viewed with a wide lens that also includes the sprawling internment camps, prison farms, and infamous *laogai*, all filled to the brim with Uighur dissidents, members of the Church of Almighty God, or those simply caught in possession of religious books or audio Bible players.

What is left after such a comprehensive and long-lasting campaign of cultural and spiritual destruction? László Krasznahorkai, in his book *Destruction and Sorrow beneath the Heavens*, an evocative account of the decline of Chinese traditional culture, cites the calligrapher Tang Xiaodu, who in his own telling

grew up in a world, after Mao, in which nothing was important. We had no clear goals. My generation's way of thinking really oversimplified things. We were indifferent to everything. And we did not confront the real problems. What was essential in the ancient world was that everything we call culture was somehow applicable to everyday life: How can poetry, music, painting, calligraphy be made personal, transmuted into the essence of everyday life, that is, how can all this become life itself — will it become my life, in the final analysis, and am I capable of leading my life according to the concepts of a highly refined tradition? In ancient tradition, art, philosophy and life were not sharply differentiated. In today's world, the connection between tradition and everyday life has been shattered.

Without these traditions, Chinese public life threatens to become one long quagmire of technocratic sludge, marked by an intrusive social credit system, the all-seeing panopticon of the surveillance state (typified by the “Sharp Eyes” project, with its “full coverage and no dead ends” both outside and even inside homes), monumental corruption, scholarship subjected to the utterly Orwellian Central Network Information Office Reporting Center for Illegal and Undesirable Information, a proliferation of valueless “ghost cities,” fatal levels of pollution, and a demographic crisis that will produce a society with as many eighty-five-year-olds as eighteen-year-olds in a matter of decades. None of these developments are unique to China, which, for all its “advanced socialist culture,” is merely leading the way as the manufactory and economic engine of sterile modernity. GDP growth is not spiritual growth, and the human soul will always need the past, and the stability of timeworn traditions, to situate itself in the present and maintain any hope for the future. This immutable truth is one China will eventually have to confront, as will the rest of the world.

Yunnan, 1914

It is only fitting that we end this journey in the company of Victor Segalen, who soon after his retreat from the Black Salt Pit wound up in a lonely valley featuring what seemed like a statue, albeit one eroded down to a “shapeless sandstone lump.” “All its contours,” Segalen despaired, “have disappeared, all the living lines have fled. This place is unsparing. This really is it, more disappeared than lost, for the forms that gave it life have departed, been licked away and absorbed; all that is left is a pebble, matter, coarse-grained sandstone.” He could have moved on, but instead he lingered in that harsh place and began to sketch the relic, “with almost superstitious reverence, and out of habit.” Gradually the lost outline of the statue began to reappear in his notebook — it was a Han-era tiger, with its “supine

body,” “vigorous torso,” and “arched neck,” notable for its “collar-bone's haughty recoil.” “The appearance of an ancient shape as it emerges out of a dull block of stone,” Segalen understood then, “is a magical, logical evocation,” replicating the “movements made by the original sculptor in another time, as he struggled with deliberate taps of the chisel on the faithless stone — efforts the stone did not bother to preserve.” “This,” he concluded, “is how I succeed in carving the fluctuating fortunes of the worn stone once again, giving it substance in this pure imaginary space. The harder of the two is not the perfidious sandstone.” For a moment it was just as if, say, one of the Hsüan Te incense burners were glowing once again.

What we know has been lost, or nearly lost, can be still reconstituted or rescued. What we do not even know to be lost — the unknown unknown — is necessarily gone for good. Such is the true horror of cultural destruction, which forever impoverishes our collective cultural patrimony, leaving us in a state of benighted ignorance, vulnerable to the vulgar appeal of barbarism and despotism. Even the most unprepossessing lump of sandstone may represent an invaluable bequest from generations past. Victor Segalen struggled to forestall the disintegration of these relics while warning us of how, without intervention, “faithless stone” will steadily erode until any vestige of its former glory has dissolved and its “living lines have fled,” leaving only an “unsparing place.” We have largely failed to heed his advice. Today there are no hidden paths to the Peach Blossom Spring, no mossy roads to the Black Salt Pits. There remains only that perilous line separating “what has been done” and “what is to come,” and the corrective voices of white ghosts, and black ghosts too, guiding us along, if only we would listen.

Victor Segalen's own living lines fled on May 21, 1919, in the rock-strewn Breton forest of Huelgoat, not far from a place called *la grotte du diable*, “the devil's grotto.” The Sinologist died, the coroner concluded, “under mysterious circumstances,” and whether his end was self-inflicted or per misadventure will never be known. By his side lay an empty goblet, a pocket watch — stopped precisely at midday, the ancient “hot and holy hour of ghosts” — and an open copy of *Hamlet*. One last ghost story, appropriately enough:

*I could a tale unfold whose lightest word
Would harrow up thy soul, freeze thy young blood,
Make thy two eyes, like stars, start from their spheres,
Thy knotted and combined locks to part
And each particular hair to stand on end,
Like quills upon the fretful porpentine.*

Even in our secular age, we remain haunted by the past and bedeviled by the spectral state. But the indigenous Yi people of Yunnan, among others, have come through to the other side, the ever-present menace of wild ghost officials notwithstanding, and to this day they sing:

*His ears are millstones
His eyeballs stars
His arms iron pillars
His fingers iron bars*

*When you meet him
That king of death
Don't you hesitate
Don't be afraid.* 🐅



THE AMERICAN SPECTATOR

SPORTS ARENA



Major-League Sports Faces Major-League Problems

The pandemic and a troubling politics addiction threaten the future of professional sports.

by Larry Thornberry

Not that long ago things were looking up in America. The economy — relieved of heavy taxes and regulation placed on it by eight years of Obama — was growing apace. Americans of all stations and all complexions were returning to work and prosperity. Far-left humbugs were no longer deferred to at the highest levels of the executive department. Their mission to micromanage our lives was at least slowed. There was reason for cautious optimism, even though we all knew the cultural termites — education, entertainment, big news media, universities, corporate America, publishing — continued to eat away at the country's foundations.

But that optimism was soon brought to an abrupt and complete halt. First there was the spring of 2020 and the arrival of a dangerous virus that proved a threat to both life and liberty. Blue-state politicians abused this very real threat for political purposes, as they do all crises, real or manufactured (see climate change and systemic racism). It's been all downhill since. We have the bug on the run, but there's no evidence that the Left will ever be ready to let go of it, as it helped so much in allowing Democrats to win the White House and both the U.S. House and Senate last year. The termites are now in full control, and we have a Democrat administration that's aggressively, and all too successfully, pushing an agenda that

combines crony capitalism with cultural totalitarianism. The future of just about everything in America is in question.

And this includes sports. It's an institution that many considered solid and untouchable, even as various controversies roiled the nation. It's not hard to see why so many thought sports was safe, a source of unifying entertainment and an escape from the tendentious. No more.

Americans, particularly those of the male persuasion, have always been sports crazy. We love our games. We love playing them, watching them, and talking about them. The love of our sports teams and the memories they've blessed (or cursed) us with have been part of America's cultural connective tissue for generations. A fair fraction of the father-son bonding in America has taken place with the aid of sports. My late father and I were no exception.

Professional sports leagues have profited greatly from Americans' love of, practically obsession with, sports. Leagues have survived, often thrived, through world wars, a Great Depression, and various cultural and political upheavals. Heck, sports even endured and survived Howard Cosell. But there are indications that the sports gravy train may be slowing.

Like other sectors of the American economy, major-league sports took a major financial hit due to the COVID pandemic. When it became clear last



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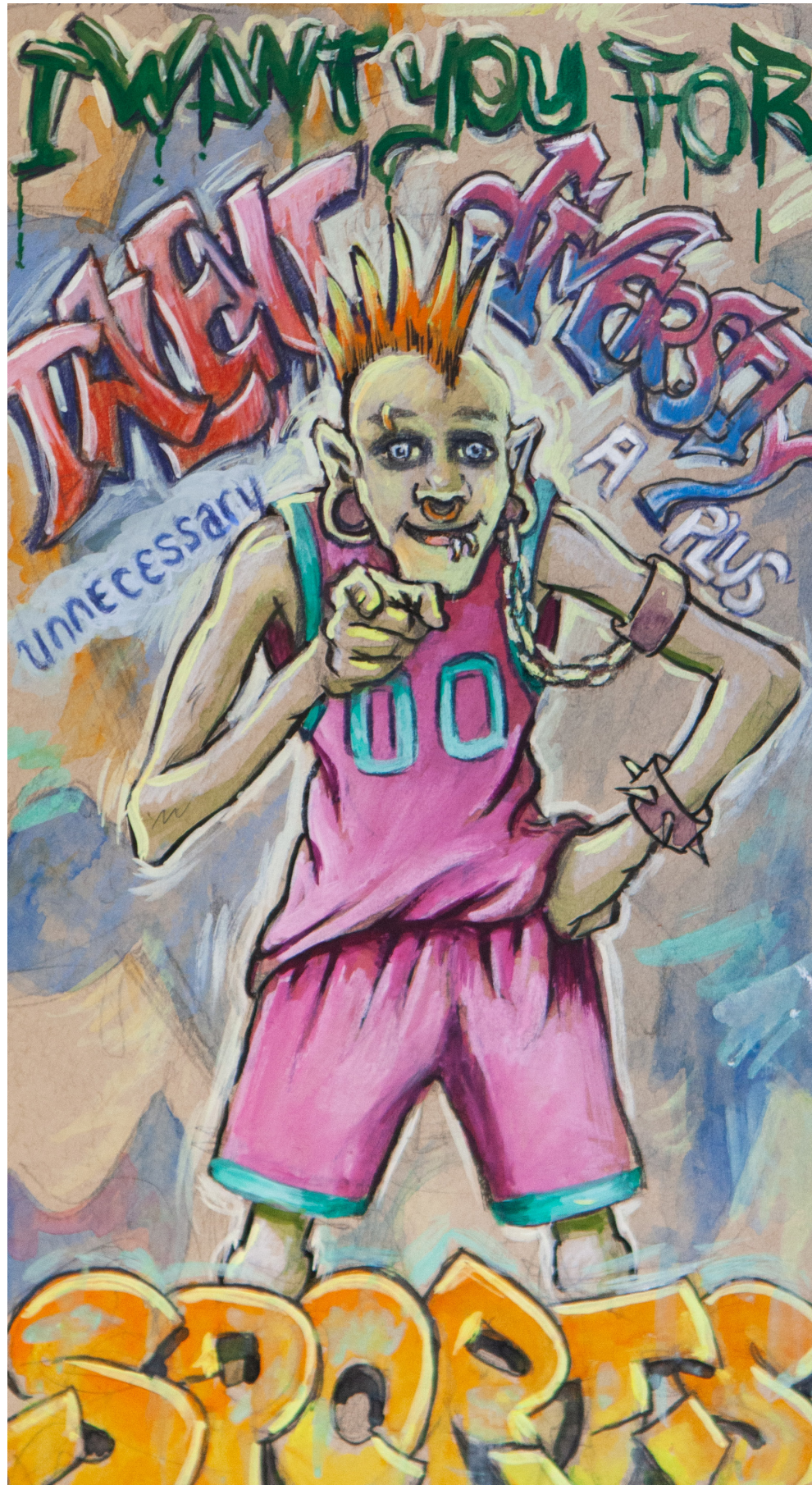
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year that pro sports would be played before empty houses, *Forbes* magazine estimated the four majors together — football, basketball, baseball, and hockey — would lose about \$5 billion in revenue. This March the magazine reported the final figure was closer to triple that amount. (Caution: Financial numbers — and there are many ways to compute these — are a closely held thing in professional sports, as they are in most industries. There are Hollywood accountants who can demonstrate with charts and graphs that *Gone With the Wind* has yet to make a dime. So the following numbers should be taken as approximations.)

Unlike when I was a youngster and baseball was indeed the national pastime, number one on all scorecards, football is now by far America's favorite sport, and the National Football League its richest league. Most sources put NFL revenue for the 2019 season at \$16 billion. That's up from a mere \$6 billion in 2004. For 2020, a season with very few butts in stadium seats, the NFL took in \$12 billion, thanks mostly to television revenue. By the time the NFL season begins in late summer, fans will be returning to stadiums. But that \$4 billion is lost forever. And it's not chump change, even for a sports league whose commissioner's pay package alone is larger than the GDP of several countries.

Forbes reports that Major League Baseball lost between \$2.8 and \$3 billion in the pandemic-shortened, fan-free season. ESPN reports that the NBA's revenue dropped about 10 percent for the 2019–20 season, about a \$1.2 billion loss, with continued losses adding up thanks to attendance restrictions continuing into the 2020–21 season.

In a CBS News report early this year, these losses were deemed “substantial but not crippling.” Assuming no new pandemic, no backsliding on COVID, or no other excuse for politicians to lock down the economy, including sports stadiums, again, these significant losses will be a one-off. But even with stadium turnstiles back in action, there are trends that could be lasting and should concern those who run professional sports, even college “amateur” sports, which on the financial level are pretty damn professional.



The Modern Recruiter, 2021 (Bill Wilson Studio)

The first blight on big league sports today, at least for everyone save those on the “social justice” left, is politics on the field. The NFL, NBA, and MLB, already thoroughly corporate, have also become thoroughly political and thoroughly part of the current left-wing putsch. Sports used to be a unifying, politics-free zone. Now they're just another forum for politics, and politics of the woke variety. And those are terribly divisive. This has caused loss of ticket sales, TV viewership, and fan interest. It will cause more in the future if sports executives don't wise up and stop driving their customers away by slandering the country so many sports-loving Americanos love. Calling a majority of sports ticket buyers and TV viewers racist scum doesn't seem like the best long-range marketing strategy.

It started in 2016 when Colin Kaepernick, a so-so quarterback then with the San Francisco 49ers, decided to take a knee during the playing of the pre-game national anthem to protest what he called racial oppression of and police brutality toward blacks in America. (Neither complaint holds up to examination.) Other players followed his doleful example. At first the NFL made a lame attempt at getting players to stop political posturing on the field. But by the summer of 2020, after the explosion of protests and riots that followed the death of George Floyd, NFL owners and executives threw in the towel. NFL commissioner Roger “Croesus” Goodell actually apologized to Kaepernick and the other players who scolded the paying customers for being closet Ku-Kluxers and described America as a racist hell-hole (a hell-hole in which these guys are doing quite nicely, thanks very much).

“I wish we had listened earlier, Kaep, to what you were kneeling about and what you were trying to bring attention to,” Goodell said in a cringe-inducing statement on a YouTube show in August. He went on to claim that his players are not unpatriotic and that what they're trying to accomplish has been distorted by “misrepresentation.” They're just “trying to ... exercise their right to bring attention to something that needs to get fixed.” What it is that needs to be fixed and how, of course, he didn't say. No one in the systemic racism chorus ever does.

The bogus charge of systemic racism that got its start in the NFL has since metastasized to the NBA and MLB. Black Lives Matter signage is all over stadiums

and arenas, players wear scolding messages on jerseys, games are canceled for political reasons, and leagues strike poses with sappy “public service” ads and player testimonials that amount to political witnessing. Leagues do things like move all-star games to protest perfectly reasonable election laws and badger teams to change their mascots if any leftist indignation group objects to them. No more Washington Redskins. Goodbye Cleveland Indians — even though every survey of real Native Americans shows a large majority either don't care about Indian team names or like them. No matter. Chronic malcontents and woke white snowflakes don't like the names, so they have to go.

Speaking of snowflakes, they're the second long-range problem sports will have to deal with. Young people are less interested in sports than previous generations have been. Many boys would rather play computer games than watch a three-hour ball game of any kind. Clearly the national attention span has shortened since our lives have been taken over by the internet, smartphones, and instant everything, leaving hallowed practices like reading, serious analysis of anything, and watching sports in danger of extinction. To put it bluntly, we have an entire generation with its head up its apps.

Professor Michelle Harrolle, director of the Vinik Sport and Entertainment Management Program at the University of South Florida in Tampa, conceded that both politics on the field and lack of interest on the part of young Americans

are problems for professional sports. But she said the first issue is two-sided, with younger people actually liking the fact that sports teams and leagues are taking the leftist political stands they are indoctrinated into at their high schools and pricey colleges.

She's doubtless right. But these youngsters are the same folks who are turning their backs on sports. And it's a tough case to make that any of them are buying tickets to or tuning into games they wouldn't otherwise watch because sports executives are hamming it up on the fields about systemic racism. This lot is far outnumbered by the long-time ticket buyers and TV watchers, us old Mustache Petes who know very well America is not a racist country and resent having to be preached to about it as part of the price of watching the games we've loved for a lifetime. Many of these Americanos, including me, have given up the games because we love our country more. The gym I pay my sweaty respects to most days is full of guys like this, including some with whom I used to go to ball games.

Just a few years ago it looked like a prosperous America included an ever-expanding and ever more financially rich future for professional sports. But it should be clear enough now to the NFL, NBA, and MLB that their check-engine light has come on. How well they do in the long — and even the medium — run will depend on what repairs they make. At the moment, there's no reason to think they'll get that engine running smoothly again. 🍸

**“An impassioned case against a senseless system ...
Come for the cocktail recipes, stay for the call to arms.”**
— Clay Risen, *American Whiskey, Bourbon, and Rye*

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Deregulated Drinking: A Rare Pandemic Pick-Me-Up

The wave of rolled-back restrictions shows how less government is more — and more fun.

by C. Jarrett Dieterle

By this point, any semi-astute political observer has heard of Rahm Emanuel's oft-repeated quip that one should never let a crisis go to waste. In fact, it's become something of a theory of governance in Washington, D.C., with policymakers seizing upon whatever recent crisis — real or imagined — they can find to advance their preferred policy agenda.

The Biden administration appears to be no exception to this governance-by-crisis mentality as it seeks to use the COVID-19 pandemic as ground cover for a whole host of long-desired liberal policy outcomes. Many left-leaning politicians and commentators are open about their desire for the recently enacted COVID aid provisions to become permanent.

So while the recent pandemic crisis has been used to expand the size and role of government in many ways, the truly remarkable, if underreported, story of COVID-19 is that it has led to *less* government in some areas. Clearly, there's more than one way to keep a crisis from going to waste.

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Various levels of government leaped at the chance to deregulate and eliminate burdensome rules that handicapped our ability to overcome the impacts of the virus. For instance, laws and regulations around telehealth were streamlined, occupational licensing requirements were modified to allow health-care workers to move and work across state lines more easily, and zoning laws were amended to permit restaurants to add more outdoor sidewalk seating.

One sector in particular underwent a robust regulatory bonfire, and, lucky for us, it was our old friend — booze. When the pandemic hit, restaurants and bars were forced to close overnight or operate with substantially reduced capacity. The now-ubiquitous neighborhood craft distilleries, breweries, and wineries suffered similar fates as social distancing protocols and stay-at-home orders brought the food and beverage industry to its knees.

Grocery stores and restaurants quickly pivoted to curbside pick-up and delivery models in an attempt to weather the storm, but things were not so easy when it came to alcoholic beverages. While restaurants could offer takeout nachos, most states forbade them from throwing in a to-go margarita. And while grocery delivery was already taking off pre-pandemic, many locales in America

did not allow shoppers to have their favorite bottle of wine delivered to their door alongside their eggs and milk.

As with telehealth, occupational licensing, and zoning laws, COVID-19 shifted state lawmakers' attitudes toward alcohol significantly. Government officials were forced to confront the reality that alcoholic beverages in twenty-first-century America were still largely governed by outmoded laws that sometimes dated back to the pre-Prohibition era. Governors and mayors began using emergency orders to temporarily clear away these burdensome and antiquated rules, and once state legislators and city councils began to meet again, efforts commenced to make many of these changes permanent.

States like Iowa and Ohio permanently permitted bars and restaurants to sell to-go cocktails, and many others are currently looking to follow suit. Georgia and Louisiana expanded the ability of grocery stores to deliver alcohol, and Kentucky passed a landmark bill to allow bourbon and other alcoholic drinks to be shipped to consumers' doors.

COVID-era America also became a roving, de facto open container zone as citizens started drinking on front stoops, in city parks, and while walking down



I'll Take That To Go, 2021 (Bill Wilson Studio)

sidewalks. State lawmakers responded by filing bills around the country to allow more towns and municipalities to establish open-container zones, which permit residents to walk freely outside in certain areas with alcoholic beverages in their hands.

Many might be tempted to chalk up this wave of drinking deregulation as a cute but relatively insignificant story compared to so many other pressing issues facing the country. But to do so is to vastly underestimate the economic impact of the alcohol industry in today's America. The craft alcohol boom has launched an explosion of breweries, distilleries, and craft cocktail bars from sea to

shining sea, and the industry has become one of the country's best engines for job growth in recent years.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the industry found itself on the brink, hoping that all its hard-earned growth would not suddenly disappear overnight. Thanks in part to smart and timely efforts to shrink and reform government regulations, many of these businesses have found a way to endure. Proponents of limited government would be wise to pour themselves a glass of whiskey and start sharing this story of how *less* government can be the perfect tonic in a crisis. ☞

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6	8	1	9	2	4	5	3	7
8	4	6	7	9	2	1	5	3
7	1	3	8	5	6	4	9	2
9	2	5	4	1	3	6	7	8



Unmasked

It turns out that the best way to wear your politics on your sleeve involves wearing them over your mouth.

by Daniel J. Flynn

Like the dark pajamas for the Khmer Rouge or the silver and black for Raider Nation, the mask came to represent a national uniform for the United States of Social Justice.

An “In This House We Believe Science Is Real” lawn sign once sufficed to announce one’s political commitments. But that improvement on the Nicene Creed does not travel as well as a piece of cloth. And all those letters do not say as much as that mouth-muzzling fabric does.

People experienced this spring’s V-F Day — Victory over Fauci Day — in different ways at different points in different places. Some felt liberated by walking sans masks into the supermarket; others, betrayed. This latter, sizable group kept the mask on as an act of defiance, like those who had earlier walked naked-facedly into establishments requiring the coverings. But it struck as an act of another sort: theater. That performance captivated the performer most — especially during presentations riding solo in automobiles or home alone.

But amid the public, one could, if looking hard enough, almost see the scowl beneath the cloth covering in response to the smiling, maskless masses. These masked men and women remember the worst year of our lives, the one that gave license to impromptu moralistic lecturing and schoolmarmish stares atop all the death and toilet paper shortages, as the best year of their lives. It awarded them their dream job: moral policeman.

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The fact that Halloween, Mardi Gras, and the periodic *Eyes Wide Shut* neighborhood orgy provide opportunities to nostalgically wear their favorite facial accoutrement offers little consolation. Those afflicted with political obsessive-compulsive disorder saw their prayers for coerced sameness answered in the mandates. Now this freedom?

Dana Stevens writes at the *Atlantic* that “some of us simply find comfort in going around with a scrap of cloth on our face” to protect the “emotional” safety of others. She claims that “wearing a mask in public spaces — especially indoors, where transmission is more likely — serves a broader social purpose: It says to those around us that, whatever our vaccine status, we value community safety.”

Ashley Fetters of the *Washington Post* laments that mask removal means the end of “a 14-month respite from the murmurs, raised eyebrows and directives to ‘Lighten up,’ or ‘Gimme a smile!’ — mostly from men” toward women suffering from a condition, inspiring more social distancing than coronavirus, known as RBF — “resting bitch face.”

These post-vaccine Eeyores looked not to the science of Dr. Fauci but to the fashion of Daft Punk, Bane, Mr. Wrestling II, and the Black Knight of “just a flesh wound” fame. It was never about the science. It was always about the symbolism.

If a “Monsters Are Due on Maple Street” quality colored pandemic America, “The Masks” anticipated post-pandemic USA. In that classic *Twilight Zone* episode, a dying man dragoons his four heirs to don masks he says represent traits at odds with theirs but really project the greed, vanity, cowardice, and brutality dominating their souls. “Without your

masks,” the wealthy patriarch informs, “you’re caricatures.” The heirs win their inheritance but at the cost of their faces permanently reflecting the ugliness inside. The dying man also bequeaths the gift of self-awareness.

In our live-action *Twilight Zone*, vaccinated characters insist on wearing masks. In doing so, they show their faces — to us but not, alas, to themselves. Similar to the oblivious ingrate heirs, they imagine their vices — sanctimony, preachiness, preoccupation with appearance — as virtues. Ironically, the coverings they aggressively pushed on others best serve their main impulse of broadcasting their goodness now that fewer people heed their advice (once issued both verbally at great volume and behaviorally in silent but demonstrative crossings of the street at the approach of bare-faced pedestrians).

Can Moderna create a cure for this sickness? In our up-is-down world, the muzzle provides for expression. And the opinionated feel a tic to share their views on everything as ideology becomes religion in this increasingly godless age. It turns out that the best way to wear your politics on your sleeve involves wearing them over your mouth. And for people who mistake comedy, sports, advertisements, and everything else as primarily an excuse for imparting political lessons to others, a pandemic served as the opportunity to flaunt correct beliefs. What a shame all that ended!

You wear your cross around your neck. They will wear their mask over their face.

The lifting of mask mandates means the people still hiding behind their masks can no longer hide behind their masks. The concealment is no disguise. We now know who they are. They want it that way. ✎

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