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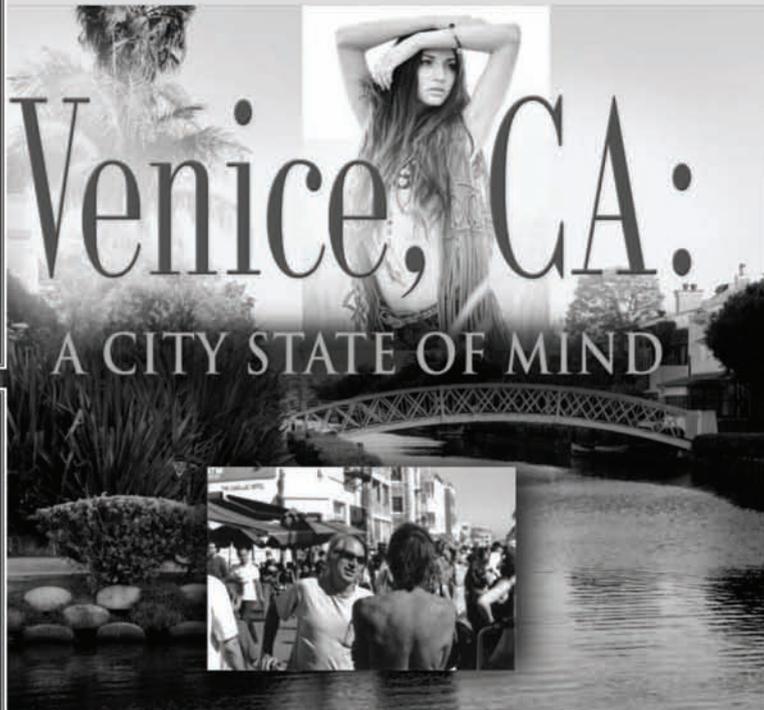
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"John O'Kane's Venice, CA is a tour de force. This landmark historical narrative is a must-read for anyone who wants to understand the cultural significance and social impact of this city by the sea that birthed The Doors, novelist turned beat poet Lawrence Lipton, renowned architect Frank Gehry and countless other romantics."
— JASON LEOPOLD, author of *News Junkie*

"This bohemian beachfront neighborhood in Los Angeles has found a witty, melancholic and nostalgic chronicler in John O'Kane, whose travels across Venice's space and time is reminiscent of Walter Benjamin's ramblings around Berlin and Paris or Iain Sinclair's around London."
— CARL BROMLEY, Editor of *Nation Books*

"If you are religious, John O'Kane's book on Venice, California, will enlarge your spiritual life. If you are not religious, O'Kane will take you from the continent's edge to the authentic American spirit."
— HARRY E. NORTHUP, author of *Where Bodies Again Recline*

"Since it began, Venice, California has attracted eccentrics, rebels and renegades—many who were talented, innovative artists and dedicated, profound poets. Even now with the influx of wealthier denizens, it retains a quirky, somewhat seedy yet vibrant vibe. John O'Kane in *Venice, CA: A City State of Mind* chronicles its saga with insights into the personalities who made up the mix of freedom seekers in his well-researched and fascinating, larger-than-life history of this small California beach town."
— MARY KERR, Producer/Director — *Venice West and the LA Scene*



A reminiscence that celebrates Venice's heyday as an alternative community and what survives from it in the present. Is the "poor man's beach" that once nurtured bohemians and creative life-stylists becoming just another upscale resort with wall-to-wall condos and gentrified A-frames? Many ordinary folks live suspended in a time warp, influenced by both past and present, coping with and transforming current Venice while remaining optimistic about the future.

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photo by Slobodan Dimitrov

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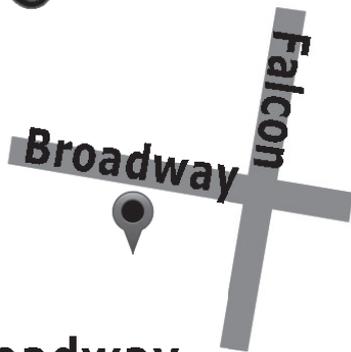
Slobodan Dimitrov is a photographer based in the Long Beach/Los Angeles Harbors. His 20 year long project on the Piledrivers can currently be seen in the lobby of Local 2375, Wilmington CA. He was selected for the Los Angeles Public Library Neighborhood Project to document the community of San Pedro for the public archives in 2000. In 2008 he received another commission from the Los Angeles Public Library to document industrial Los Angeles in the Port of LA. In July 2010, the Artist Portrait series was exhibited at Angels Gate Cultural Center. To date he has had over 130 exhibits, nationally and internationally. He has been a contributing photographer for *The Dispatcher*, *LA Weekly*, *The Building Trades News*, *Random Lengths*. His work has appeared in *The Nation*, *Carpenter*, *Solidarity*, *SEIU*, *UNITE*, *Machinists Int.*, *America at Work*, *The Progressive*, *Los Angeles Magazine*, and *The Economist*, among many labor publications and newspapers. sdimitrovphoto.com

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CLAIMS ABOUT IMMIGRANTS AND HEALTH CARE

SOLANGE UWIMANA

Fox News contributor Laura Ingraham continues to make outlandish allegations about how the Affordable Care Act (ACA) applies to immigrants, including falsely claiming that the law allows undocumented immigrants to purchase subsidized health insurance and that their enrollment in the individual Marketplace will be used to inflate the overall numbers of those who sign up.

MYTH: Undocumented Immigrants Are Eligible For Subsidized Health Insurance Under ACA

Contrary to what Ingraham has been saying on her radio show, undocumented immigrants are not eligible to apply for subsidized health insurance under the ACA. On the October 3 broadcast of her show, Ingraham advanced that falsehood, asking, “First of all, how many of you think that illegal immigrants aren’t signing up on these Obamacare exchanges?” She added: “I mean, they’re probably the only ones getting through to sign up on the exchanges.” Ingraham was referring to the difficulty those seeking insurance have had in accessing the federal health care website.

In reality, as the National Immigration Law Center has noted, undocumented immigrants cannot get subsidized health care coverage under the ACA and are not even allowed to purchase private insurance through the individual health insurance Marketplace at full cost. They are also not eligible for subsidized health care or Medicare, nonemergency Medicaid, or the Children’s Health Insurance Program (CHIP).

As the federal health care website explains: “Undocumented immigrants aren’t eligible for federal public benefits through the Affordable Care Act. For example, undocumented immigrants can’t buy coverage through the Marketplace. Premium tax credits aren’t available for undocumented immigrants.”

Undocumented immigrants may continue to buy coverage on their own outside the Marketplace and can

get limited services for an emergency medical condition through Medicaid, if they are otherwise eligible for Medicaid in the state. Undocumented immigrants aren’t subject to the individual shared responsibility requirement. Immigrants who have been granted deferred action through the Obama administration’s Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program are also ineligible for Medicaid, CHIP or ACA benefits.

While undocumented immigrants are barred from applying for subsidized health care, their American children do qualify. Naturalized citizens, permanent residents, and legal immigrants who have lived in the country for more than five years and don’t have health care coverage through their jobs are also able to apply for subsidized health care and other benefit programs under the ACA.

Legal immigrants who have been in the country less than five years whose incomes fall below 400 percent of the federal poverty level -- about \$46,000 for an individual and \$94,000 for a family of four -- will be eligible for subsidized coverage in the health insurance exchange. Those with incomes below 138 percent of the federal poverty level -- about \$15,800 for an individual and \$33,000 for a family of four -- will not be eligible for Medicaid coverage (except for pregnant women, depending on the state) but can qualify for exchange subsidies if they pay 2 percent of their income. Other immigrants including refugees, asylum seekers,

and those lawfully present under humanitarian measures, also qualify for coverage regardless of how long they have been in the country.

MYTH: “There’s A Special Portal Just For” Undocumented Immigrants To Sign Up For Insurance

Discussing her assertion that undocumented immigrants are “probably the only ones getting through to sign up on the exchanges,” Ingraham suggested that there is a “special widget” for a cell phone and a “special portal just for them” to sign up for insurance. She went on to dismiss the fact that undocumented immigrants are ineligible for health care coverage through the ACA: “Maybe there’s a special widget you have to have on your phone. If you’re an illegal immigrant, you can actually go through that portal. Maybe there’s a special portal just for them to sign up for Obamacare. I wouldn’t be surprised. I mean, the idea that they’re going to be denied coverage under

The bizarre claim that the administration will encourage undocumented immigrants to sign up for the health exchanges to inflate enrollment numbers is not new.

-- Solange Uwimana

Obama - oh, come on. We weren't born yesterday."

According to the federal health care website, Healthcare.gov, there are several ways to apply for health insurance on the exchanges and none involve a mobile app: by filling out and mailing a paper application; online through the federal or state websites or through an online commercial broker; by phone with a customer service representative; in person with a trained and certified assister or navigator, or at community health centers and hospitals. To date, the only way to apply for insurance by phone is by calling the 1-800 number provided at healthcare.gov. While there are a number of medical mobile apps on the market, none are yet designed to sell insurance.

U.S. News & World Report reported in September that insurance start-up company Oscar "has hired tech professionals from Microsoft, Tumblr, and the gaming company Vostu Ltd. to deliver a user-friendly experience when buying insurance. The company will sell plans on the New York exchange in 2014." According to *Government Technology*, "most users won't be able to shop or apply for plans entirely from their smartphones until late 2014 or 2015."

MYTH: Administration Wants "As Many Of The Illegal Immigrants As Possible To Sign Up For Obamacare" To Boost Enrollment Numbers

Discussing the congressional testimony of Health and Human Services Secretary Kathleen Sebelius, who faced questions on October 30 from lawmakers about the problems associated with the health care rollout, Ingraham said on her radio show: "They don't have any luxury of saying we'll tell you [how many people have signed up

for insurance] at the end of November. You know what, I was thinking about that. She wants to put it off until the end of November because they're gonna try to get as many of the illegal immigrants as possible to sign up for Obamacare, because you can't really check all that well on the Obamacare exchange website about immigration status. They'll do anything they can to put off actually having to reveal the pathetic number of people who've signed up."

The bizarre claim that the administration will encourage undocumented immigrants to sign up for the health exchanges to inflate enrollment numbers is not new. A similar falsehood emerged in right-wing media circles in August when Sebelius explained at an event that under the Senate-passed immigration bill, newly legalized immigrants would not be able to apply for subsidies to purchase health insurance or have access to the health care exchanges and the expanded Medicaid program. Sebelius went on to say that this "is, frankly, why -- another very keen reason why we need comprehensive immigration reform." Conservative media used her remarks to claim that the reason Sebelius called for passing comprehensive immigration reform was "to boost Obamacare enrollment."

While administration officials have said that an official enrollment number will not be available until mid-November, "nearly 700,000 applications have been submitted to the federal and state marketplaces" as of the end of October, according to Marilyn Tavenner, the administrator of the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services. The Advisory Board Company, which tallies early enrollment data from the 15 state-based exchanges, has reported that through data compiled October 30, at least 150,000 people have successfully picked or have enrolled

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in a plan. More than 389,000 people have applied for coverage. *The Wall Street Journal* further reported on October 27 that states have signed up tens of thousands of new Medicaid enrollees. In California, 600,000 people were reportedly enrolled in Medi-Cal, the state's Medicaid program, as of the program's first day.

As Jonathan Cohn wrote in the *New Republic*, low initial enrollment for health insurance doesn't necessarily spell doom for the ACA: "The main reason for low enrollment will be that people don't sign up for health insurance programs right away. They wait until the last minute. This is true of public insurance and this is true of private insurance. And while you've heard people (including me) say this for months, this is one of those cases when numbers tell the story better than words. And there are some numbers very few people have seen."

The numbers are from Massachusetts, the state whose health reforms became the template for the Affordable Care Act's coverage expansion. The place to look is within what's known as the "Commonwealth Care" program, which is where people getting private insurance subsidies shopped for plans--in other words, an analogous structure to the new federally run exchanges. Cohn cites data from Jonathan Gruber at MIT who showed that only 0.3 percent of people had signed up for health insurance in Massachusetts after one month, and just 6.3 percent after two. And according to the *Boston Globe*: "Pushed by the threat of a penalty if they were uninsured, many more people -- healthy people, in particular -- shopped for insurance as the [January 2008] deadline approached. By December 2007, 171,847 were covered through the Connector."

MYTH: HealthCare.Gov Can't Really Verify Immigration Status Of Applicants

Ingraham rationalized her claim that the administration will "try to get as many of the illegal immigrants as possible to sign up for Obamacare" by saying that it's "because you can't really check all that well on the Obamacare exchange website about immigration status." But the healthcare.gov website is very clear that in "order to buy private health insurance through the Marketplace, you must be a U.S. citizen or be lawfully present in the United States." In fact, one of the first things you need in order to prove you are eligible for health insurance through the exchanges is a valid social security number. The information provided is then checked through a "data services hub" to determine eligibility.

Federal and state Marketplaces and state Medicaid and CHIP agencies verify application information through a "data services hub." The hub allows the Marketplace and Medicaid and CHIP to securely submit application information. The federal government sends information back to verify the data. According to Reuters, the hub "links the online health insurance marketplaces with numerous federal agencies and can verify people's identity, citizenship, and other facts." It further noted: "Without the hub, consumers are unable to apply online for coverage or determine their eligibility for federal subsidies to help pay for insurance premiums."

MYTH: Undocumented Immigrants Will Be Able To "Game" Health Care Marketplace With No Consequences

On October 28, *The Weekly Standard* highlight-



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ed a healthcare.gov information sheet about what immigrant families need to know about the health care marketplace, noting that “the site goes to great lengths to explain that Marketplaces, whether federal or state, are not permitted to ask for the immigration status of family members who are not applying for coverage or benefits.” It further noted that the site makes clear that “[s]tates can’t deny benefits because the applicant doesn’t provide the SSNs of people who aren’t applicants for benefits or recipients of Medicaid or CHIP benefits, or those not required to provide SSNs.”

On her radio show, Ingraham used that article to claim that this is proof undocumented household members of lawful immigrants will be able to gain coverage under their lawful relative’s policy. She stated: “The site goes to great lengths to explain that the Marketplaces, whether federal or state, are not permitted to ask for the immigration status of the family members who are not applying for coverage or benefits” -- meaning the family members are going to be part of the umbrella policy. She continued: “You get a policy -- you got a legal brother who’s here or an illegal wife, they’re part of it. They get access under the federal exchange, which is what we told all of these Republicans, who said don’t worry about it, it’s gonna be great. It’s gonna be great.”

She played a clip of Sen. Marco Rubio (R-FL) stressing that under the Senate immigration bill, newly legalized immigrants would not have access to federal benefits or health care benefits, then stated: “Oh my god, poor Marco.”

Ingraham went on to argue that undocumented immigrants would be able to “game” the system and try to get coverage because even if the application process reveals an immigration violation, “no action will be taken relative to immigration laws.” She added that this “is creating perverse incentives for wrongdoing and it doesn’t surprise me one bit.”

What Ingraham failed to grasp however is that *anyone* who applies for coverage, whether through an individual or family plan, will be subject to verification. So in the scenario she outlined above, the undocumented wife *would have* to provide information about her immigration status for verification, which would automatically bar her from coverage. Indeed, as the Marketplace makes clear, there’s no reason for those who aren’t applying for coverage or who won’t be included under a family plan to provide their immigration information.

The more important takeaway from this, however, is that this practice, which Homeland Security noted is long-standing and “in line with ICE’s [U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement] operational focus,” is a way to reach and allay the fears of the estimated 16 million people who live in mixed-status families. This demographic is historically under-insured and studies have shown that these immigrants are hesitant to apply for health benefits they qualify for out of fear of adverse immigration consequences.

Solange Uwimana writes for MediaMatters.org.

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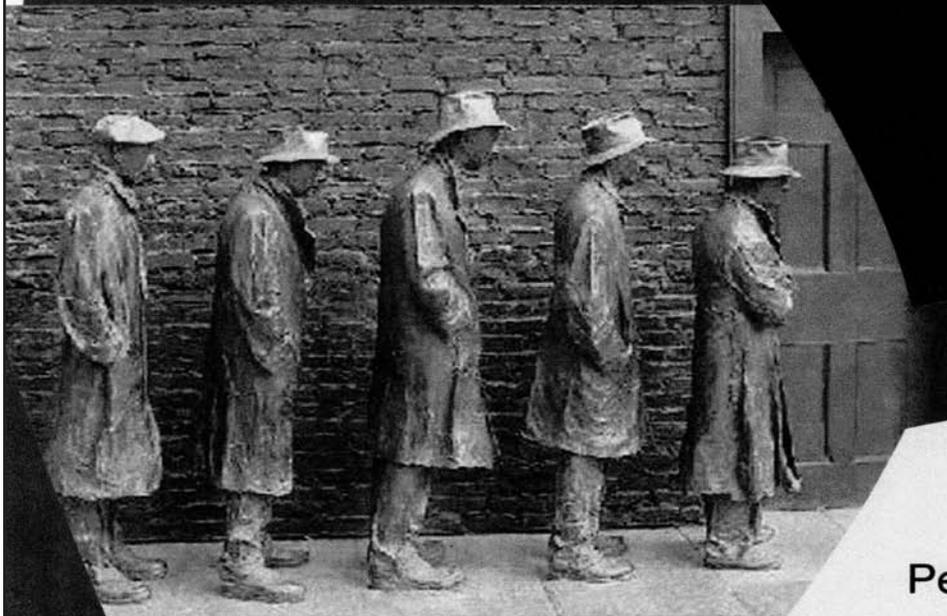
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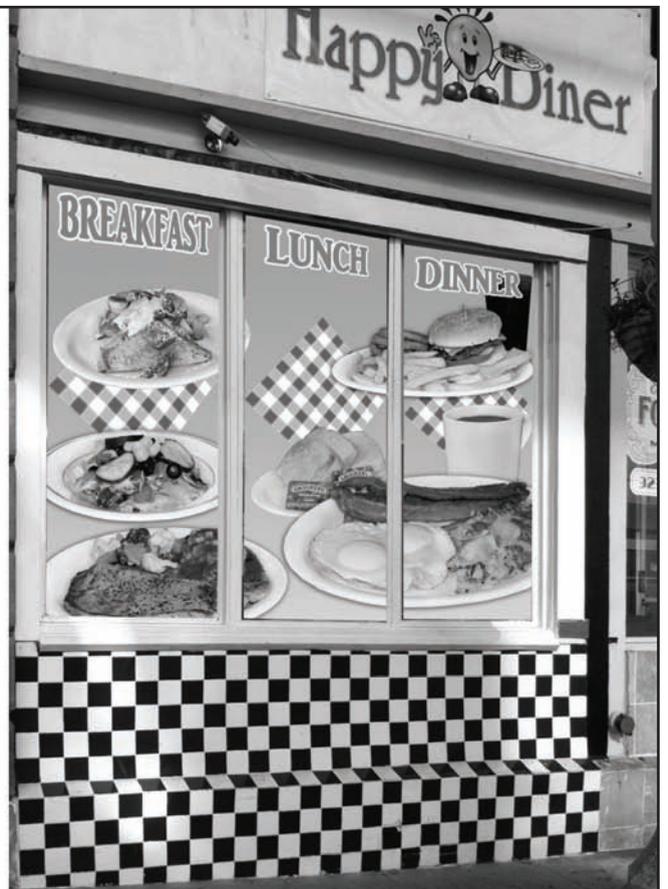
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POSTCARD FROM THE END OF AMERICA

LINH DINH

Though Riverside has successfully reinvented itself before, it is now stuck. During the middle of the 19th century it was a resort town, a place for the well-to-do of Philadelphia to mellow during the sultry months. They chugged up the Delaware by steamboats. Some steamed into town on rails. There were summer homes here, and a grand hotel with a ballroom. When the train reached the New Jersey Shore, however, Riverside couldn't compete with the Atlantic Ocean, and so it slumped into irrelevance, a forgotten fork in the river, but then it picked itself up and morphed into an industrial center. For a tiny town that never had more than 9,000 souls, it became a leading manufacturer of watch cases, worsted fabric and hosiery.

These industries lasted for decades, but with the invention of wrist watches and cheap, synthetic fabrics that could be churned out in countless other places, they petered out. Once more, Riverside lay on the canvas, with its mouthpiece knocked into the fifth row, and it was snoring loudly (in a darkened arena) when the housing bubble arrived, affording a decade-long reprieve. Coinciding with this, there was also the opening of the RiverLine. For only \$1.50, one could go all the way from idyllic Camden to picturesque Trenton. Throngs of shoppers and diners would get off at the Riverside stop, so went the local daydream, but of course, this conveyance has also been whisking money away. In any case, outsiders who do de-train all seem to head for the Madison, a rather upscale pub in a brand new building. They don't go anywhere else.

On a recent Friday afternoon I strolled down Scott Street, Riverside's main drag, and pretty much had the sidewalk to myself. I passed a closed Golden River Restaurant (despite its Chinese-sounding name, it advertised

classic diner fares), then a kaput Beadscape, "Beads and a bit of déjà vu," then American Clothes, "AMERICAN STYLES FOR ALL WOMEN AND CHILDREN." In its display windows there were trophies and a potted plant where clothing should be, and painted on a wall was an ecstatic cartoon face surrounded by musical notes and a G-clef, all to disguise, sort of, that the business was dead. In front of its door, a trash can had been placed to prevent anyone from lying there. Franco's Taqueria, however, was open.

Continuing, I encountered a storefront sign offering walk-in zumba and yoga instructions on Mondays for only \$5 per class. I'm assuming these lessons are conducted separately, for it would be difficult to hold, say,

a pincha mayurasana "feathered peacock" pose, with one's arms jackknifed on the floor and one's feet straight up in the air, while rhythmically thrusting one's hips to salsa or samba. With persistence or prayer, however, all things are possible, I've been told. The tropical pink and green of this display led me to think it was a South American operation, but no, the proprietor of Pizzazz, "Fitness with Flair," was a discernibly blonde and pale Karen Lightfoot, and she would turn up again, just two doors down, as co-pastor of the Riverlution Church.

Lightfoot's bio declares that she is a "prophetic minister" who has been "trained by the Holy Spirit with a special anointing in ministering with flags." With her husband, Ken, a mailman by day, Karen is semaphorically steering lost souls into the Kingdom of God, provided it's not too foggy. The 3,000-square-foot of the Riverlution Church was, not that long ago, Riverside's last bookstore, owned by Barbara Shropshire. In neighboring towns there are Christian booksellers and one that purveys African-American literature.

Though I had seen few signs of commerce on my walk, downtown seemed neat, dignified and pleasant, and the kids leaving school were all calm and cheerful. Seeing a crossing guard, I chirped, "This is a pretty town."

"What?!" She broke into a huge smile at the apparent absurdity of my assertion.

"This is a pretty town."

"I've never heard that before." She could barely

**Doubling back to
downtown, I saw, in a
window, a baseball
trophy with an
American flag
stuck on it, so I took
out my camera, tried to
find the proper angle
and adjusted the ISO,
aperture and shutter
speed.**

-- Linh Dinh

refrain from laughing. "This town has really gone downhill, though it's picking up a little."

"From what I've seen, I can tell that it was once really beautiful, but it's still nice. Are you from here?"

"Been here my whole life, either in Riverside or Delanco, across the creek." She was about 40-years-old. "Where are you from?"

"I live in Philly. I just took the train up to look around. I've read about this place."

"You have?!"

"You said this place is picking up, but how?"

"Immigrants. They're bringing some life to Riverside. Most of them are Brazilians."

"But what brought them here?"

"Construction. You see these white trucks all over? They belong to contractors. There are a lot of contractors here."

Elsewhere, white contractors employ Mexicans, but since many of the Riverside builders are Portuguese, they hire Brazilians, most of them undocumented. The tension over this influx boiled over when Riverside passed laws penalizing employers for hiring illegal immigrants, and landlords for renting to them. Though these laws were challenged in court and never applied, they did chase many of the Brazilians away.

Leaving downtown, I strayed into the residential neighborhoods, and notwithstanding a handful of boarded up houses and many "For Sale" signs, all was, again, tidy and dignified. Hinting at Riverside's former wealth, there was a number of huge homes. Flags fluttered on poles

or were furled over porches. With the country fighting wars after wars, one is bombarded with an infinity of patriotic symbols, signs and declarations. Every couple of blocks, there was a flyer taped to a pole, advertising a yard sale, for as our military contractors gorge on billion-dollar contracts, we are reduced to selling whatever we have left to make ends meet, be it silverware, DVDs of movies no one has ever heard of or broken toys. We take our gold bracelets from dealer to dealer, hoping for a slightly better price. Some even sell wedding rings.

Making its partial withdrawal from Afghanistan, the United States is leaving behind seven billion dollars' worth of equipment. To take this home would be too expensive, and since anything that's left intact may possibly be weaponized, Uncle Sam is destroying everything before selling it for scrap. Suddenly filled with foresight, he doesn't want a Special Force grunt or CIA spook blown up, two years hence, by some ingenious Taliban contraption made up of a microwave timer, a high-tech ice cream scoop, an SUV fan belt and a Katy Perry standee.

Doubling back to downtown, I saw, in a window, a baseball trophy with an American flag stuck on it, so I took out my camera, tried to find the proper angle and adjusted the ISO, aperture and shutter speed. With its scratched sensor and erratic software, this beat up machine is just about ready for a Kabul junk dealer. Oh Lord, will you buy me a new Canon or Nikon?

"Taking photos, eh?"

I turned and saw some beefy guy with a beard, in his mid 50s, so I said, "Yeah, I'm taking a picture of this

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flag.”

“Right on!”

Since he seemed a friendly sort, I asked, “Hey, I’ve walked a couple of miles and haven’t seen a single bar. Where can I get a drink around here?”

“See that flag down the street? There’s a bar right there. In fact, that’s where I’m going!”

So that’s how I met Steve. The RaceTrack 75 Sports Bar appeared newish, with all its barstools shiningly upholstered in checker flag pattern. There were seven televisions, but only four were beaming and babbling. The two up front showed American sports, while those at the rear had on Portuguese programs. Behind the bar, a sign touted, “RISSOIS. CAMARAO E CARNE. PASTEIS DE BACALHAU.” Another, “FRANCESINHAS A MODA DO PORTO.” Four dapper men at the back conversed in Portuguese. Ragged by comparison, I sat at the front near Steve and a white-bearded gent in a tan baseball cap, blue flannel shirt and gray sweat pants. He seemed cheerful enough, but worn out. A bottle of Bud was only \$2.50, but I didn’t know this, so ordered Yuengling, which set me back four bucks. This space was too open and bright for my taste, but thankfully there was no music to disrupt conversation. I said to the tired man, “I was told Riverside is filled with bars, but I walked all over town today and couldn’t find any.”

“There used to be lots. There was one across the street.”

“Why are they gone?”

“I don’t know...money.”

“How many bars are left now?”

“Let’s see, there’s the Beer Factory, the White Eagle, JD’s, McCrossen’s, this place and Towne Tavern, which is more upscale. I can’t afford to drink there. There’s also Casa Brazil. So that’s, what, seven bars? There used to be at least twenty.”

“How long have you lived here?”

“I was born here, and never left until I joined the service. I was in Vietnam for two tours. When I got out, I moved to Florida and stayed for nearly forty years. 9/11 brought me back.”

“What do you mean?”

“I had a business doing laundry for these big hotels, but the tourists stopped coming after 9/11. I’m old anyway, so it was time to come back. I live off my social security now. Each day, I come here and take it easy.”

“They pick him up each day at noon,” Steve chimed in. “Each day! Then take him home in the evening.”

“Who does?”

“Her husband,” Steve nodded to the bartender.

“I come, drink my twenty bucks, then go home,” the tired but cheerful man chuckled.

“Wow, these people are really nice if they pick you up at your house each day.”

“They are, and I don’t even tip most of the time. I’d start out thinking I’d tip, but between having one more beer or tipping, I’d choose the beer. They don’t mind, though. Do you, Teresa?”

“Do what?” She was at the cash register, with her

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back turned.

“Do you mind that I’m so cheap?”

“No, I love you, Joe!”

“They’re the nicest people. Some of my friends say, ‘Why do you drink at that Portuguese bar? You should be at the White Eagle!’ But they treat me very well here.”

Leaning closer, Steve confided, “Many people here don’t like the Portuguese or the Brazilians. They come and take our jobs, you know. A few years ago, we passed a law to get rid of illegal immigrants.”

“Yes, I’ve heard about that.”

“There was this Brazilian café owner, he got mad, so he put a sign in his window, ‘No Americans allowed.’”

“That guy’s not Brazilian, he’s Portuguese,” Joe corrected Steve.

“Yeah, you’re right, but after he put this sign up, the sheriff came and told him to take it down.”

“Wow, that’s pretty weird, that sign,” I cringed.

“That guy owns a few apartments,” Joe added, “so he was also mad because these new laws were chasing his tenants away. Hey, you’re not Portuguese, are you?”

I laughed out loud, “No, I’m Vietnamese.”

“If you turn your head this way, Joe, his eyes become rounder and he does look sorta Portuguese,” Steve joked.

We all just sat there for a moment. I then asked Joe, “When were you in Vietnam?”

“Sixty-seven and sixty-eight. I was just eighteen years old. Just got out of high school. I fought in the Tet Offensive.” Joe just stared at me, his cloudy blue eyes clearly seeing what wasn’t in Riverside, New Jersey, that day or ever. After the weightiness of it all had settled again, Joe continued, “My father fought in World War I and World War II, and four of my brothers were in the service. I was a baseball prospect, you know. After high school, I had sixty scholarship offers.”

“Six?!” I interrupted him.

“No, sixty.”

“Sixty! You must have been great!”

“I was. I was a catcher, and I hit .400 in high school. I could probably have made it as a professional, but my father said, ‘We have a war now,’ so I enlisted. I didn’t know what I was doing. I had a small life. We were into bebop and Elvis, and next thing I knew I was killing people. Your people!” Joe started to tear up. I put a hand on his shoulder and moved it back and forth. The red-eyed vet continued. “The government put us into this terrible situation. All of a sudden, we were there. Our first day, we saw two American corpses, and they had their genitals cut off and stuffed into their mouths.”

“What?! I’ve never heard of anything like that.”

“But that’s what we saw. And now, I’m thinking I’m not sure who did this. I’m thinking maybe it’s our own government that did this, to get us riled up. They did it so we would hate the Vietnamese.”

Steve hadn’t really paid attention to what Joe was saying, for he had probably heard it before, but suddenly he interjected, “I spent twenty years in the Army, and I was in Desert Storm, but now I’m not sure what it was all

about. The politicians don’t care about us, man! They’ve sold this country to China! Look at this.” Steve took off his watch to show me its backside. “What does it say?”

“The spirit of America.”

“And you know where it was made?”

“China?”

“Bingo! Of course, China, and I bought this watch through the VFW magazine!”

“This used to be an industrial town,” Joe jumped in. “Half the clothes in the world were made here. Now we don’t make nothing. What we need is a tariff on all this made in China stuff. That’s how we can level the playing field.”

But higher tariffs mean higher prices here, plus a cut in profits for all the US firms who’ve moved their manufacturing to China, not to mention a hurting for America’s real first family, the Waltons of Walmart. Since our bought politicians lick these fat cats’ asses, it ain’t gonna happen, OK? So we sat there and shot the cow pies (to dust, until dusk). Joe asked my age, then kidded, “You know who your daddy is?”

“Dad!” I shouted.

“You two look exactly alike,” Steve opined with a straight face. To prove this to all and sundry, I asked Steve to snap a photo of me with my head clumped against Joe’s. Steve then showed me his dent nose, a result of a punch in mean ass Tennessee, “And I wasn’t even after his wife!”

Speaking of wife, Steve’s own showed up, but within twenty minutes they argued and she stormed out, only to return 45 minutes later to ask him, sweetly, to come home. They left with this weasel-like character with a cane. After they were gone, Joe explained that the weasel had been jailed for about 13 years for murder, and was now stealing pills from Steve’s wife to get high. “Four or five of them killed somebody, but this guy got the longest sentence.”

Joe had reached his brew allotment, so I bought him two more Buds, but then he paid one last round with a credit card. “You know, I’m supposed to be dead,” Joe grinned. “I have liver cancer. Seven years ago, a doctor said I had six months to live.”

“So that’s your last beer, Joe!” said nurse Teresa. “After you finish that, my husband will take you home!”

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Cheating on death, or maybe just one doctor's erroneous betting line, Joe will chug and chatter until his own factory shuts down, for good. During the height of the housing bubble, there were plans to turn the Tabel Mill and the imposing Keystone Watch Case building into condominiums. Needless to say, these schemes have been scrapped.

Before I left the bar, I met one more gentleman who filled me in on Riverside. Born in Portugal in 1962, Harold was two-years-old when his parents brought him to the States. They first settled in Newark.

"Why are there so many Portuguese in Riverside?" I asked. "What's the attraction?"

"I don't know. It's like somebody moved here first, then the rest followed. The river may have something to do with it, and the hills. It reminds them of home, maybe? Most Portuguese are fishermen."

"You know, my sister-in-law is Portuguese, and her family is from Stockton, California. They're farmers."

"Hmmm, I don't know any Portuguese farmers, but there must be farmers, I suppose. Most of us are fishermen. The codfish is huge in our culture. The codfish is ninety percent of our culture!"

Later in the conversation, Harold gave me his take on Riverside's immigration quandary. "First, the Brazilian men came, and they were living ten or twelve to an apartment. Each morning, you'd see hundreds of Brazilians coming out of these buildings. Then some of them brought their wives and children over, so suddenly there were all these Brazilian kids in the schools. The locals really didn't like that. They were saying, 'These people are here illegally, they don't pay taxes, and now we have to educate their kids too?' And since these kids didn't speak English, they had to be put in ESL classes. Even as a Portuguese, I can see why people were upset."

"But you also hire Brazilians for your business?"

"How can I not? How can I compete if I don't hire Brazilians? Everybody everywhere is hiring illegals!"

Eventually, the solution is for Americans to become illegal immigrants elsewhere. Living twelve to a

room in Shanghai or Dubai, we can eat, speak and do everything very badly in a culture not our own. Still, it beats chewing air in Barefoot, Kentucky or Zigzag, Oregon. Each month, we'll wire some renminbi home. "Where are you from?" we'll be asked repeatedly by the locals, and each time, it will sting us anew because that's another way of saying, "What are you doing here?" Even our foreign-born children or grandchildren will be similarly interrogated. "No place special," they will answer. "My grandparents came from the United States of America. Ever heard of it?"

On our way to such banishment, we'll pass through wars, riots, oppression and madness, though many of us are loony enough as is. Taking the RiverLine away from Riverside, I happened to sit in front of a raving man who, at first, I thought was on a cellphone discussing business matters. Sounding self-important, he spoke loudly enough so that the entire train car could hear. Most riders ignored his monologue, but some couldn't help but smile at the inspired madness. "Yes, the Heifer Foundation does excellent work, but so does the Lactation Institute, with its bovine specialists. No, there is no coordination between the tongs and the yakuza, but I'll have to check with my Chinatown contacts before I get back to you. You have to keep in mind, though, that a tong is not necessarily criminal. The Duck Soup Tong, for example, is perfectly legitimate. Yes, Schwarzenegger has gotten back into the news. He just cracked some joke about Iowa. I know that state well, and just this year, I was in Cialis, Iowa, and Viagra, Iowa, and I can tell you that it is an invigorating state, and also very upright. You really should visit Cialis and Viagra, Iowa."

And this man was still delirious as I stepped off the train in Camden. Into the night, I walked, and into the dark he rode away. Good night, everyone. Good night.

Linh Dinh is the author of two books of stories, five of poems, and a novel, *Love Like Hate*. He's tracking our deteriorating socialscape through his frequently updated photo blog, *State of the Union*.



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TAKING EXCEPTION TO EXCEPTIONALISM

BERNARD A. WEISBERGER

In his recent speech that put on hold his request to Congress to authorize the bombing of Syria's chemical weapons sites, President Obama — no mean orator himself — faced a familiar orator's problem. How would he end on a strong and upbeat note while announcing what was in fact a sensible retreat from his "red line" pledge dictated by clear and overwhelming evidence that both Congress and the public at large had no appetite for any more Middle Eastern interventions? How could he still defend America's assertion of its role as the enforcer of the "civilized world's" conscience even as he stepped back from the brink?

The words he chose nodded in both directions. "America is not the world's policeman," he acknowledged. "[I]t is beyond our means to right every wrong." Then he added: "But when with modest effort and risk" (something entirely impossible to guarantee) we can stop children from being gassed to death. . . I believe we should act." But why us alone? That cued the final trumpet flourish. "That's what makes America different," said the president. "That's what makes us exceptional. With humility, but with resolve, let us never lose sight of that essential truth. Thank you. God bless you. And God bless the United States of America." Pleased as I was with the outcome and its sequel so far, I couldn't help thinking of George M. Cohan's remark that "many a bum show is saved by the American flag."

For there it was, the magic word, the popular core belief that we are the recipients of God's special favor. Other nations, of course, believe much the same thing, but not with the broad sweep of the claim of America, where we do things on a grander scale. It is an essential truth, we say, that we are unique in history because prior to the modern age we had no history.

Our national origin myth is that the United States was born in a state of immaculate innocence. Voiced best in the nineteenth century by the popular historian (and loy-

al Jacksonian Democrat) George Bancroft, it ran like this: The discovery of a "New World," the Renaissance, the Reformation and the "Enlightenment" of the eighteenth century were all overtures to the grand curtain raising on the birth of the United States. One of our christening gifts was a "virgin" continent sheltered by two oceans, ours to possess without obstruction except for the inconvenient presence of heathen savages without the power to resist modern weapons. The other, even more important, was a blank slate, scrubbed clean of the crimes, errors and follies, the wars and oppressions of the past. We could create, unhindered, whatever government we desired. We could invent a national character for ourselves in whatever form we wished.

What might that be? For the Puritan founder of Massachusetts, John Winthrop, we were destined to be a "city upon a hill," the eyes of all mankind turned on us as, in his words, "a model of Christian charity." In the sweeping imagination of Tom Paine, victory in the American Revolution would give us the freedom to "begin the world anew." Fourscore and seven years later, Lincoln announced that the Union's survival in the Civil War was vital to the entire world, because it was an experiment in democracy whose failure would cause the very idea of popular government to perish from the earth.

In those forms, exceptionalism had a positive face. It inspired the signers of the Declaration of Independence to risk their lives, fortunes and sacred honor. It nerved nineteenth century reformers like

abolitionists or women's rights advocates to fight on to victory in the face of contempt, hostile laws and physical assaults. It gave trade unionists the courage to defy the bullets and billy clubs of repression in their struggle for the equal rights to which America's founding documents entitled them. To progressives it furnished the patience to persist for years in legal and political battles to make real the Preamble to the Constitution's oft-forgotten promise to "promote the general welfare." And it shone again in the peaceful struggle of the modern civil rights movement to hold America to its promises.

But exceptionalism has another uglier mask. Its hidden core of arrogance has often turned it into a kind of nationalism-on-steroids that carries with it imperial swagger, the itch to crush dissent at home, and a defiant statement to the world that we're free to ignore what Jefferson called "a decent respect to the opinions of mankind." Re-

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-- Bernard A. Weisberger

branded as “Manifest Destiny,” it was used to justify unnecessary invasions of Canada and Mexico, the eventual establishment of colonies in the Pacific and a period as the de facto suzerain over the weak governments of the Latin American nations of this hemisphere.

Curiously, both the benign and the sinister interpretations — the Jekyll and Hyde versions, we might say — have something in common, too long and too commonly neglected by our mythmaking historians. Neither of them is true. We have never been as “original” as they claim.

Democracy was not invented here. Neither was capitalism or Protestantism, the distinguishing characteristics of the first British settlers in North America. Even as colonies we were part of a trans-Atlantic culture. Our books and arts, our faiths and our economic practices were imported mainly from Great Britain and Western Europe. The first simmers of revolt here rested on the colonists’ demand for “the rights of Englishmen” gained in the mother country by uprisings a century earlier that had beheaded one king and deposed another. The elite among our Patriot leaders were familiar with the works of the French philosophers who were busily undermining the intellectual foundations of their absolute monarchy. James Madison, often called “the father of the Constitution” for his heroic labors in the Convention, like many fellow members was familiar with the theories and performances of republics in ancient Greece, Renaissance Italy and the Swiss confederation and Dutch republic of their own time. Knowledge like that guided their own choices among the political and

practical deals they had to make as, in their own words, the great charter was “hammered, reasoned, shaped, argued, cajoled and compromised into being.”

As for creating a government on a blank slate free of crimes and errors?” No way. By 1787 it already had a century and a half of slavery and the theft of Indian land inscribed on it.

That’s not to deny the radicalism of the American Revolution, or the early existence of new and especially American habits of speech and forms of art. Voting into existence a people’s government — even with a limited electorate at first — was a daring leap into unknown seas, bordered by powerful nations still ruled by hereditary absolute monarchs and aristocrats. We were as much a novelty as the new plants and animals that our frontier exploration parties kept bringing home — a process, it’s worth remembering, also going on in other newly “discovered” parts of the world.

But 1787 was two and a quarter centuries ago. The democratic ideal, if not the practice, has long perched its banners over most of the globe. Our own democracy is no longer a lusty infant, but one of the world’s oldest, plainly suffering plutocratic and imperial dysfunctions and in need of a thorough popular overhaul to reclaim its genuineness.

The version of exceptionalism now peddled by Tea Party fable-makers has already done our economy noticeable harm. It convinces too many. It turns upside down our supposed hospitality to innovation by attempts to seal us off from learning anything from other, younger democ-

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racies. Improvements in health care, education, energy conservation — name your cause — are dismissed out of hand as “socialism,” bent on destruction of “the American way.” That kind of head-in-the-sand obstructionism is what we used to deplore in what we called “backward” parts of the globe. And what a useful tool it is for keeping the rich beneficiaries of our current unequal status quo in the top-dog position!

The damage that “unique” America has done as Dr. Hyde, fortified by a super-sized military establishment, is huge. Where once we independent-minded Yankees scoffed at “heel-clicking Prussian militarism,” the media and political establishments of today brag of our “superb” armed forces, while reporters covering Pentagon press conferences, as well as congressional committee members, struggle to outdo each other in deference to the beribboned generals who appear before them.

The international consequences are even worse. At a time when we need the world’s friendship and cooperation, the exceptionalist mindset licenses administrations of both mainstream parties to override the sovereignty of other nations in the interests of our own safety. Think of drones aimed at terrorists (so identified in secret by us alone) in neutral Pakistan or “allied” Afghanistan that take the lives and homes of nearby or mistakenly targeted civilians. Mere “collateral damage” to us, we ignore the scope of their tragic suffering. Think of CIA kidnappings on the streets of foreign cities under the very noses of their own police forces. Think of the symbolic impact of our refusals to sign international treaties banning the use of land mines or child soldiers, or of the special exemptions we demand from prosecution by local law authorities of crimes committed against civilians by our military personnel in the countries where we have bases established. What kind of self-portrait are we painting?

True, almost all nations commit offenses against common decency and common sense in the mindless fervor of war. Our country is not the only sinner or possibly the worst. But “We’re Number One” hyper-patriotism is simply the collective self-admiration of empty minds. It’s not what the American Revolution was fought for. Not what Tom Paine and Lincoln had in mind. The Declaration of Independence only says that we were seeking “the separate and equal station among the nations of the earth” to which the laws of Nature and Nature’s God entitled us.

That’s why I believe that it’s time to let exceptionalism become a creed outworn. It has lingered too long for whatever good it has done. But won’t that bury its positive and creative side?

Not necessarily. We don’t need that particular prop in order to believe that as a nation we should hope to realize the ideals of justice, individual dignity, decency and mercy embodied somewhere in almost all the world’s religions and secular codes of law from ancient times — if not always achieved, at least as goals to aspire to. This would not be the “isolationism” with which critics of our imperial overreach are now being charged. Rather, the effort to design a new moral compass for international relations in a world whose peoples are now more interdependent than

ever. One that does not need the “leadership” of a single super-power — not even the United States.

I have no naïve dreams of armies vanishing overnight. But the unchecked violence of our times must be somehow reduced before it destroys any hopes of a decent future for humanity. If the United States would take an active role as a partner in the process, rather than an armed dictator of terms from a lofty perch of morality, it would go far towards restoring the admiration the world long felt for us when our military establishment was tiny and our practice of democracy was robust. Think what fine speeches could be woven around that essential truth.

Bernard A. Weisberger is an historian who has been by turns a university professor, and an editor of *American Heritage*.

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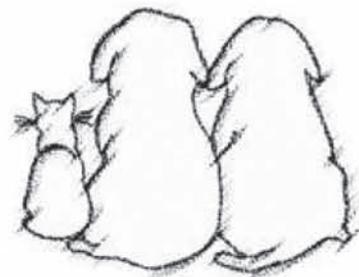
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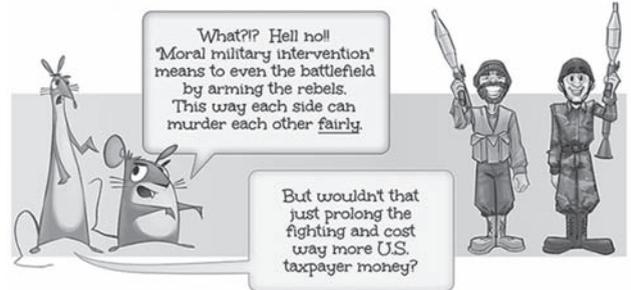
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...lots of things...

I'm scared of the anger and divisiveness an armed conflict would create.



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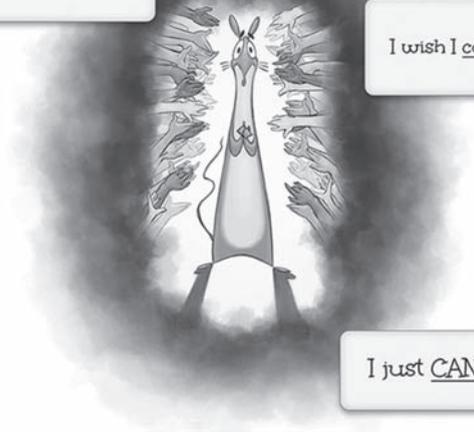
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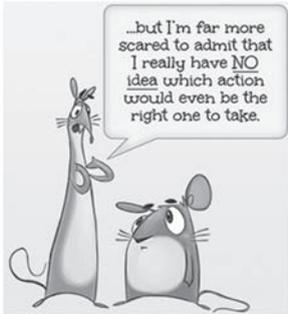
I wish I could...

I just CANT.

I'm scared of the awful guilt I'd feel if people are harmed because of NOT taking action...



...but I'm far more scared to admit that I really have NO idea which action would even be the right one to take.



So, instead, I listen to the ideas of others I'm told I should trust. But secretly... I don't trust any of them either.



If not because I'm scared they're complete idiots...



Then simply because I'm scared they're outright liars.

I'm scared of voicing my opinion too loudly...



...cuz what if I get into a long discussion and someone asks me a question I can't answer?



So, instead, I become condescending or irate before anyone else can make a valid, contrary point.



'cuz after all... who wants to feel stupid?



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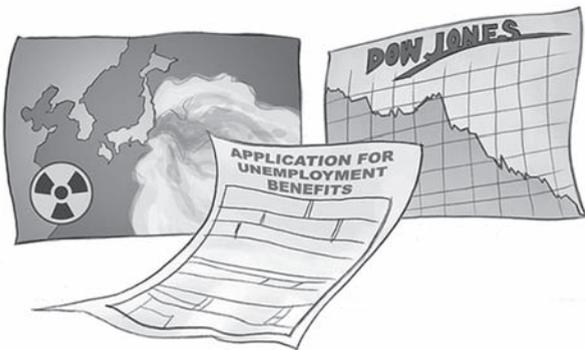
But I'm also scared, if I refrain from voicing ANY opinion, some wannabe-internet-scholar might view that as apathy and call me a "sheep."

And that scares me, too.



'cuz after all... who wants to feel stupid?

Then I remember all of the other problems in the world...



and am reminded of how small...

and ineffectual...

and insignificant I am...

...unable to affect any change WHATSOEVER!

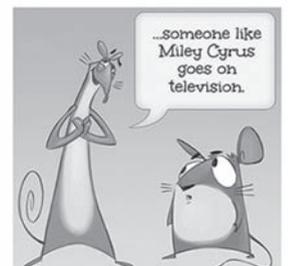
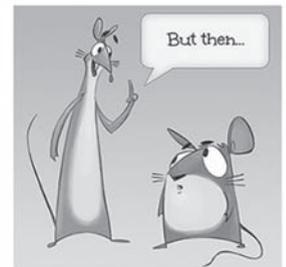


And I feel like I could go insane!!

But then...

...by the grace of GOD...

...someone like Miley Cyrus goes on television.



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Who allows me the chance to stand at a distance and be judgmental and feel superior...



Okay, we get it! You're a woman now!



...and distracts me for just long enough that I forget anything is wrong in the world at all.

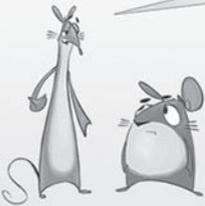
And - secretly - I'm grateful for this distraction, 'cuz more than anything...



...simply because they lack the energy needed to search and fight for the right solution.

And - in today's world - what could be scarier than that?

...I'm just so tired of feeling scared.



So, I guess... I'm actually scared that a lot of people are like me.

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As far as I can tell, the subject of the debate doesn't make much difference: it could be unemployment or Fukushima or armed conflicts with Iraq or Afghanistan or even Syria.



I think emotionally drained people are all too willing to accept what they're told is the "quick solution"...

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GUARDIANS OF THE SAND

JOHN O'KANE

Wyatt's first reaction is to run north on Speedway, since the source of the lights is the Dudley intersection near the front of Desiree's place. But he puts the brakes on as a copter appears over the trees from the east and begins to feverishly illuminate the area. He notices that the car is still parked at alley's edge, but as he gets closer it's clear that no one's inside. He hears loud door-knocking in the distance along with voices.

"Is that the cops?" he whispers, while looking toward the intersection. His question is answered as his eyes meet those of a female officer. At least he thinks they meet. She doesn't seem to see him. He must be shadowed by the edge of the building. But she makes no effort to try a better angle. He remains motionless. She turns to a fellow officer and says something, and he takes the cue, ducking behind the building, waiting for a sign that this is over. He's surprised that no one approaches him. The voices continue. He remembers the female officer. She used to be very friendly, even show sympathy for his situation.

"She must've not seen me," he whispers, "but I'm not gonna hang around and find out!"

He tiptoes north across the adjacent parking lot and crawls under a Bentley parked behind a new condo. From his experience the cops usually search places that street folks are associated with or known to frequent, those where they would certainly not want to be, under or between or astride the objects considered discards by most everyone else. He stretches out under the belly of the Bentley and breathes deep. It's a curious smell, not one he expects, like fresh fertilizer, or perhaps damp leaves. He holds his nose while taking a deep breath and smells what seems like semen, but suspects it's an illusion, like when a slamming door, or backfiring car, can suggest a gun shot. No grit and grease, what he remembers from working under his old Beamer back in college when he

could almost feel the layers of history from its previous owners, see the evidence of their journeys. Perhaps the car passed through some vegetation. But the whole underside is relatively spotless. It's fairly new, but who would take such pains to clean the underside of their car? What kind of a person might they be? He tries to visualize the person. Maybe he'd seen him or her before, strutting along the Boardwalk. Maybe he or she is one of those who want him and the others off the streets.

He nearly forgets where he is and what's happening, like he's suddenly passed to a parallel universe. Still supine, he looks around and sees no one, hears nothing. Perhaps the cops left the area while he's been lost in his thoughts. He slides to the left, out from under the car's

frame, and gets up slowly, peeking over the top of the car toward the Dudley intersection. There's no activity. The only sign of life is a flutter of pigeons facing off with their shadows on the nearby wall.

He wants to go back to Desiree, but hesitates. "Get it together," he whispers, "you can't go there now!"

A car slows down at the stop sign on Rose, and turns on Speedway toward him. He ducks behind the Bentley and waits until it passes. He thinks he recognizes the driver, Courtney, who lives in a penthouse on the beach at Sunset. Probably just back from the Hollywood party scene. He lunges toward the car, breaking into a sprint, but stops in his tracks. He can't believe he did this. He hears a sound

off in the distance, perhaps from the beach, and abruptly reverses course toward Rose, cutting through a vacant lot to the Boardwalk.

He hesitates, sitting on a chair left from the day's business at the café next door. No one is on the Boardwalk. The only signs of life are a few errant seagulls, and shapes moving toward the water. Even the pagoda appears abandoned. This is a covered gathering place rimmed in benches where by day mothers strolling their babies stop and chat, senior citizens trade memory morsels, and locals bask in their shared disdain of the tourists who mostly return the sentiment chattering among the tablecloths on the east side. But by the time twilight threatens, these residents give way to a smattering of street folks, RV residents from the adjacent parking lot and a few petty dealers. The

Some take pride in their markings, even strive to get more, seeing them as merit badges earned from double-dipping in the detritus produced by others, or resume-lines for gaining a better position in their society.

-- John O'Kane

day crowd despises them, and frequently verbal assaults, and sometimes fisticuffs, flare up during the changeover. But they form a relatively functional family among themselves, a sort of in-group that's fairly aware of their situations, a few of whom had decent lives before and are trying to transition back. Wyatt knew some of them who made it over to Indiana on occasion.

As the twilight seasons and flips into darkness, the self-appointed guardians of the sand lie in wait to reclaim their turf. This changeover is more complicated. For one thing, the divide between this group and the previous one is more permeable. There's a one drop rule at work. Whereas the day crowd rigidly refuses the twilight transitioners, hence the flare-ups, because they're tainted with street life, the night crowd reverses the code. They know what it's like to be refuse. Once tainted, always tainted, could be their motto. Some take pride in their markings, even strive to get more, seeing them as merit badges earned from double-dipping in the detritus produced by others, or resume-lines for gaining a better position in their society.

So the twilighters feel like they might have a better chance of fitting into it, as opposed to the normal one, which builds up pretty rigid prejudices. Respectable normals see street folks who gorge in subterranean lifestyles like felons who are forever fingered.

Once the changeover is nearly complete, and the timid have made it back across the Boardwalk, sentries usually arrive at the pagoda. They seem like regular street folks, but with ample badges. Their purpose is to repel out-

siders, spot and divert the heat, and screen for members. They're weaponless and often accompanied by a few pit-bulls, cerbera ready to escort initiates and expel deviates.

Wyatt's surprised that no one appears to be in the pagoda area at this hour. A security breach? The aftereffects of a successful raid? Had its regular stakeholders vanished because of the activity on Dudley? They were usually more brazen and grizzled, like special ops vets not easily deterred by police action. He walks across the Boardwalk to the pagoda, unsure whether he should push further. He'd heard rumors recently that Emil, who'd been on and off the streets for several years, crossed over looking for someone who had information he needed to get some of his property back. And he never returned. Some said it was because he snuffed it at high tide, sick of the rat race, others that he found it to be not all that different from inland, and yet others that he'd finally found the place he'd always been homesick for where he could fulfill his potential and be all that he can be.

He flashes on a moment several months earlier when he crossed over briefly in the wee hours almost by accident looking for a friend. His queries only produced stares and mumbles, but he didn't feel threatened so much as embarrassed. He'd heard some grueling stories since though about what goes on here, and harbored a secret desire to return.

He was intrigued by the idea of living next to the water anyway, the sensation of being at the edge. It all stops here! This had to do something to those who had a



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desire to live better, the rush from the smell and sight, the vastness and immensity before you. It had to wake you up, give you better insight. That's why he went to the beach whenever he could. But the times were limited in the day. Had to be before or after the beautiful people arrived, in the morning or late afternoon and early evening. But ironically he learned that these were the good times anyway, when the first streams of light appeared, giving everything in their paths a different look, making you do double-takes. And when they began slipping away, withdrawing from the people and objects, making you feel sort of sad, you also felt refreshed since you knew, or at least hoped, that it would all start over the next day...

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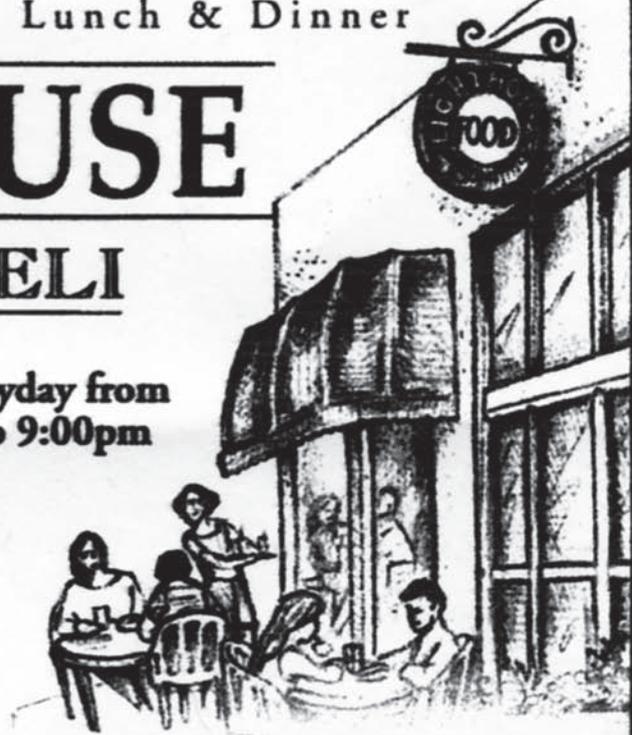
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DEFICIT REPUBLICANS ARE DELUSIONAL ABOUT SPENDING AND DEFICITS

DEAN BAKER

It is understandable that the public is disgusted with Washington; they have every right to be. At a time when the country continues to suffer from the worst patch of unemployment since the Great Depression, the government was shut down over concerns about the budget deficit.

There is no doubt that the Republicans deserve the blame for the shutdown and the risk of debt default. They decided that it was worth shutting down the government and risking default in order to stop Obamacare. That is what they said as loudly and as clearly as possible in the days and weeks leading up to the shutdown. In fact, this is what Senator Ted Cruz said for 21 straight hours on the floor of the US Senate.

Going to the wall for something that is incredibly important is a reasonable tactic. However, the public apparently did not agree with the Republicans. Polls show that they overwhelmingly oppose their tactic of shutting down the government and risking default over Obamacare. As a result, the Republicans are now claiming that the dispute is actually over *spending*.

Anywhere outside of Washington DC and totalitarian states, you don't get to rewrite history. However, given the national media's concept of impartiality, they now feel an obligation to accept the Republicans' claim that this is a dispute over spending levels.

But that is only the beginning of the reason that people should detest budget reporters. The more important reason is that they have spread incredible nonsense about the deficit and spending problems facing the

country, causing most of the public to be completely confused on these issues. If budget reporters were held to the same standards as school teachers, with the expectation that they would be able to convey information, they would all be fired in a minute.

Contrary to the widely repeated stories of out-of-control deficits and spending, deficits have plunged in the last four years falling from 10.1% of GDP in 2009 to just 4% of GDP in 2013. The Congressional Budget Office projects the deficit to be just 3.4% of GDP in 2014. The latest projections show the debt-to-GDP ratio falling for the rest of the decade.

Contrary to the widely repeated stories of out-of-control deficits and spending, deficits have plunged in the last four years falling from 10.1% of GDP in 2009 to just 4% of GDP in 2013.

-- Dean Baker

In other words, the story of out-of-control debts and deficits is just plain wrong. Less polite people would call it a lie, but it stands at the center of the public debate because the media consider it rude to point out a truth that would embarrass so many important politicians. The idea that we face a longer term deficit problem of enormous proportions has little better grounding in reality. First, it is worth noting that we have not had a constant upward path of spending as is widely asserted in Washington, and widely believed around the country, due to

the incompetence of budget reporters.

During the Reagan presidency spending averaged more than 22% of GDP, peaking at 23.5% in 1985. This year it is projected to be 21.6% of GDP. The latest CBO projections show spending rising back to Reagan era levels towards the end of the 10-year budget window.

Over a longer term, spending is projected to rise further due to projections of rising health care costs and a growing interest burden, which is the result of a growing debt. The deficit fear mongers like to hype these projections of large deficits decades in the future to advance their agenda of cutting Social Security and Medicare.

The reality is that the story of exploding interest burdens is utter nonsense since there is zero precedent for the country ever allowing the debt to expand in this way. This makes as much sense as arguing that someone driving west in New Jersey risks falling into the Pacific Ocean. People driving west in New Jersey invariably turn or park their cars before ending up in the Pacific Ocean and the United States has always taken measures to reduce deficits long before they posed a fundamental threat to the economy.

The real question is why the primary (i.e. non-interest) deficit rises and this is the story of the broken US healthcare system. We pay twice as much per person

for our health care as the average for other rich countries, with nothing to show for this money in terms of outcomes. We pay 2.5 times as much as the UK. If our costs were at all in line with those in other wealthy countries, we would be looking at explosive budget surpluses running into the trillions of dollars annually.

This fact raises the obvious question, why are projections of deficits based on unaffordable healthcare costs always treated in the media as a basis for cutting benefits to seniors rather than a reason for cutting

payments to providers like doctors, drug companies, and medical device companies? There is no explanation except the bias of the media. Obviously they identify much more with rich doctors and the people who profit from the bloated prices charged in the United States by drug companies and medical equipment providers than with the seniors who are dependent on Social Security and Medicare.

Yes, the public has every right to be disgusted!

Dean Baker is Co-Director of the Center for Economic and Policy Research in Washington DC.

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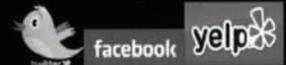
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What is freedom really? Is it the ability to do whatever you like without regard for anyone but yourself? Some people think so. But more often than not there will eventually come the time of the great hang-over, when that ultimate freedom that had been sought after so diligently has somehow lost its meaning.

*“Life’s but a walking shadow,
a poor player,
That struts and frets his hour
upon the stage,
And then is heard no more. It
is a tale
Told by an idiot, full of sound
and fury,
Signifying nothing.”*

This is what Shakespeare’s Macbeth laments after his wife, driven by her feelings of guilt, has committed suicide. Lady Macbeth had succumbed to one form of insanity, and her husband another: nihilism.

What Shakespeare knew, but would not allow his anti-hero to recognize, is that the “tale told by an idiot” is a result not of fate’s unpredictability but of Macbeth’s own actions in breaking all the rules of his society, murdering the king and covering up this murder by yet more murders. This led to his ever more paranoid actions of massacring everyone that might even potentially become a threat to him. It was those massacres and nothing else that brought on the resistance to his rule and his eventual downfall.

Nihilism, the annihilation of society’s moral rules and values would, according to Shakespeare, in the long run lead to self-destruction. I think Shakespeare was a pretty perceptive observer of society and human nature for a 16th century man. I also believe that he was right, and

that he was far more enlightened than many of our authors, thinkers and social scientists today. During the 20th century many of those thinkers came to the conclusion that nihilism, the overthrow of moral rules in exchange for a perceived ultimate freedom of the individual, would create the best of all societies.

The most important tools to achieve this freedom would be markets liberated from all moral restraints and concerns for the common good. Self-interested global financial players would, according to those think-

disciples of Ayn Rand and her ideas, which she called Objectivism. One of her early followers was Alan Greenspan, former head of the Federal Reserve and master-mind of the financial deregulation policies in the US.

Today we realize that this belief in an unrestrained market has not only brought on the financial collapse of 2008 and the instability of the whole financial system, but also the economic destruction of many nations. What the freedom of the free markets brought to most people all over the world was the freedom to die

early of malnutrition and untreated illnesses or of violence and political instability. To others it brought the freedom to live without a roof over their heads or a safe source of income and steady employment. And to those who still have those things it brought the freedom to experience the everyday fear of losing the little security they have, and the ability to support themselves and their families.

But on the other side of the spectrum market freedom has given a tiny minority of people the liberty to increase their wealth enormously and at the same time use this wealth to increase their influence on the foreign and domestic policies of their nations and on the mass-media, compounding the situation.

In the story of Macbeth, serving one’s self-interest also includes the use of lies, deceptions and the justification of mass-murders; killing those who in the future might become a threat.

American foreign policies have clearly taken on the form of Macbeth’s paranoia. This can be seen in the NSA’s spying on even its closest allies, as well as in the threatening and the actual destruction of any country that might show a slightly different economic or political model.

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-- Eve Human

ers, create the best of all worlds through accessing these markets. The survival of the self-interested species was natural in the jungle that was society. It was biological. Let all strong willed players make the market madness happen and human society as a whole would prosper.

Many of those who ascribed to this philosophy were originally

No matter how small and insignificant these countries might be economically or militarily, their very existence is seen as a future impediment to the elites' power and self-interests.

The use of violence and the destruction of ethical rules had driven Macbeth to such a height of insanity that he could no longer perceive his own responsibility in the events unfolding around him. America's acts of military violence, overt and covert warfare, and negation of the rules of international law have driven the country's political and economic elites into a similar madness, displayed recently in President Obama's scripted UN speech where he insisted on America's exceptionalism and the positive role of the military in bringing justice and stability to the world. Some consider the speech as an example of ultimate hypocrisy, but it could just as well be a sign of the most pervasive form of self-deception; a blindness to one's own responsibility for the pains inflicted on one's victims, the symptom of a psychopath.

We have to realize that the ul-

timate human rationality lies in altruism and the awareness that the other person's interest must be considered equal to one's own for a society to be sustainable in the long run.

Observations on recent events have shown once again that a culture governed by unrestrained selfishness is unstable and will eventually become violent towards the outside and destructive toward itself. This destruction within and without will subsequently even harm those who initially profited most from their self-seeking attitudes.

Rand's philosophy failed in its presumption that personal survival and the fulfillment of one's own desires and ambitions should be the highest achievement in every individual's life. Its consequences in practice were not rational but irrational, since long-term survival and well-being of the individual and his or her descendants have been sacrificed for short-term interests. The reality is that human beings are by their very nature not designed to be lonely tigers, but social beings working together in a

community. And living within a stable community will always demand responsibility for and cooperation with others, as well as compliance to commonly accepted rules. While these might be seen by some as constraints to their personal freedom, in the end society's acceptance of ethical rules will give them a most important freedom: the freedom to live!

Eve Human is a healthcare worker, blogger, poet, author of a political science fiction novel, and a peace and human rights activist. She lives in Iceland. evehuman.wordpress.com

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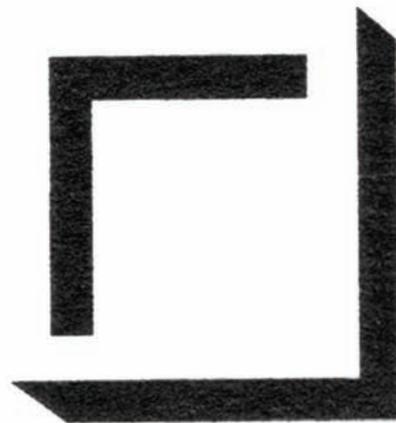
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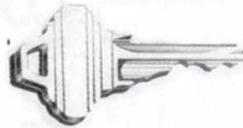
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4 IN 5 FACE NEAR-POVERTY

HOPE YEN

Four out of 5 US adults struggle with joblessness, near-poverty or reliance on welfare for at least parts of their lives, a sign of deteriorating economic security and an elusive American Dream. Survey data from the Associated Press provide the reasons for this trend: an increasingly globalized US economy, the widening gap between rich and poor and the loss of good-paying manufacturing jobs.

The findings come as President Obama tries to renew his administration's emphasis on the economy, saying in recent speeches that his highest priority is to "rebuild ladders of opportunity" and reverse income inequality.

As nonwhites approach a numerical majority in the US, one question is how public programs to lift the disadvantaged should be best focused—on the affirmative action that historically has tried to eliminate the racial barriers seen as the major impediment to economic equality, or simply on improving socioeconomic status for all, regardless of race.

Hardship is particularly growing among whites, based on several measures. Pessimism among that racial group about their families' economic futures has climbed to the highest point since at least 1987. In a recent AP poll, 63% of whites called the economy "poor."

"I think it's going to get worse," said Irene Salyers, 52, of Buchanan County, VA, a declining coal region in Appalachia. Married and divorced three times, Salyers now helps run a fruit and vegetable stand with her boyfriend, but it doesn't generate much income. They live mostly off government disability checks.

"If you do try to go apply for

a job, they're not hiring people, and they're not paying that much to even go to work," she said. Children, she said, have "nothing better to do than to get on drugs."

While racial and ethnic minorities are more likely to live in poverty, race disparities in the poverty rate have narrowed substantially since the 1970s, census data show. Economic insecurity among whites also is more pervasive than is shown in the government's poverty data, engulfing more than 76% of white adults by the time they turn 60, according to a new economic gauge being published next year by the Oxford University Press.

The gauge defines "economic insecurity" as a year or more of periodic joblessness, reliance on government aid such as food stamps or income below 150% of the poverty line.

Wilson, a Harvard professor who specializes in race and poverty. He noted that despite continuing economic difficulties, minorities have more optimism about the future after Obama's election, while struggling whites do not. "There is the real possibility that white alienation will increase if steps are not taken to highlight and address inequality on a broad front," Wilson said.

Nationwide, the count of America's poor remains stuck at a record number: 46.2 million, or 15% of the population, due in part to lingering high unemployment following the recession. While poverty rates for Blacks and Hispanics are nearly three times higher, by absolute numbers the predominant face of the poor is white.

More than 19 million whites fall below the poverty line of \$23,021 for a family of four, accounting for more than 41% of the nation's destitute, nearly double the number of poor Blacks.

Sometimes termed "the invisible poor" by demographers, lower-income whites generally are dispersed in suburbs as well as small rural towns, where more than 60% of the poor are white. Concentrated in Appalachia in the East, they are numerous in the industrial Midwest and spread across America's heartland, from Missouri, Arkansas and Oklahoma up through the Great Plains.

Buchanan County, in southwest Virginia, is among the nation's most destitute based on median income, with poverty hovering at 24%. The county is mostly white, as are 99% of its poor.

More than 90% of Buchanan County's inhabitants are working-class whites who lack a college degree. Higher education long has been seen there as nonessential to land a job because well-paying mining and related jobs were once in plentiful supply. These days many residents get by on odd jobs and government

The risks of poverty also have been increasing in recent decades, particularly among people aged 35-55, coinciding with widening income inequality.

-- Hope Yen

Measured across all races, the risk of economic insecurity rises to 79%.

Marriage rates are in decline across all races, and the number of white mother-headed households living in poverty has risen to the level of black ones.

"It's time that America comes to understand that many of the nation's biggest disparities, from education and life expectancy to poverty, are increasingly due to economic class position," said William Julius

checks.

Salyers' daughter, Renee Adams, 28, who grew up in the region, has two children. A jobless single mother, she relies on her live-in boyfriend's disability checks to get by. Salyers says it was tough raising her own children as it is for her daughter now, and doesn't even try to speculate what awaits her grandchildren, ages 4 and 5.

Smoking a cigarette in front of the produce stand, Adams later expresses a wish that employers will look past her conviction a few years ago for distributing prescription painkillers, so she can get a job and have

money to "buy the kids everything they need."

"It's pretty hard," she said. "Once the bills are paid, we might have \$10 to our name."

Census figures provide an official measure of poverty, but they're only a temporary snapshot that doesn't capture the makeup of those who cycle in and out of poverty at different points in their lives. They may be suburbanites, for example, or the working poor or the laid off.

In 2011, that snapshot showed 12.6% of adults in their prime working-age years of 25-60 lived in poverty. But measured in terms of a

person's lifetime risk, a much higher number—4 in 10 adults—fell into poverty for at least a year of their lives.

The risks of poverty also have been increasing in recent decades, particularly among people aged 35-55, coinciding with widening income inequality. For instance, people aged 35-45 had a 17% risk of encountering poverty during the 1969-1989 time period; that risk increased to 23% during the 1989-2009 period. For those aged 45-55, the risk of poverty jumped from 11.8% to 17.7%.

Higher recent rates of unemployment mean the lifetime risk

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of experiencing economic insecurity now runs even higher: 79%, or 4 in 5 adults, by the time they turn 60.

By race, nonwhites still have a higher risk of being economically insecure, at 90%. But compared with the official poverty rate, some of the biggest jumps under the newer measure are among whites, with more than 76% enduring periods of joblessness, life on welfare or near-poverty.

By 2030, based on the current trend of widening income inequality, close to 85% of all working-age adults in the US will experience bouts of economic insecurity.

“Poverty is no longer an issue of ‘them’, it’s an issue of ‘us,’” says Mark Rank, a professor at Washington University in St. Louis who calculated the numbers. “Only when poverty is thought of as a mainstream event, rather than a fringe experience that just affects Blacks and Hispanics, can we really begin to build broader support for programs that lift people in need.”

The numbers come from Rank’s analysis being published by the Oxford University Press. They

are supplemented with interviews and figures provided to the AP by Tom Hirschl, a professor at Cornell University; John Iceland, a sociology professor at Penn State University; the University of New Hampshire’s Carsey Institute; the U.S. Census Bureau; and the Population Reference Bureau.

Among the findings:

—For the first time since 1975, the number of white single-mother households living in poverty with children surpassed or equaled Black ones in the past decade, spurred by job losses and faster rates of out-of-wedlock births among whites. White single-mother families in poverty stood at nearly 1.5 million in 2011, comparable to the number for Blacks. Hispanic single-mother families in poverty trailed at 1.2 million.

—Since 2000, the poverty rate among working-class whites has grown faster than among working-class nonwhites, rising 3 percentage points to 11% as the recession took a bigger toll among lower-wage workers. Still, poverty among working-class nonwhites remains higher, at

23%.

—The share of children living in high-poverty neighborhoods—those with poverty rates of 30% or more—has increased to 1 in 10, putting them at higher risk of teenage pregnancy or dropping out of school. Non-Hispanic whites accounted for 17% of the child population in such neighborhoods, compared with 13% in 2000, even though the overall proportion of white children in the US has been declining. The share of Black children in high-poverty neighborhoods dropped from 43% to 37%, while the share of Latino children went from 38% to 39%.

—Race disparities in health and education have narrowed generally since the 1960s. While residential segregation remains high, a typical Black person now lives in a non-majority Black neighborhood for the first time. Previous studies have shown that wealth is a greater predictor of standardized test scores than race; the test-score gap between rich and low-income students is now nearly double the gap between Blacks and whites.

Going back to the 1980s,

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never have whites been so pessimistic about their futures, according to the General Social Survey, a biannual survey conducted at the University of Chicago. Just 45% say their family will have a good chance of improving their economic position based on the way things are in America.

The divide is especially evident among those whites who self-identify as working class: 49% say they think their children will do better than them, compared with 67% of nonwhites who consider themselves working class, even though the economic plight of minorities tends to be worse.

Although they are a shrinking group, working-class whites—defined as those lacking a college degree—remain the biggest demographic bloc of the working-age population. In 2012, Election Day exit polls conducted for the AP and the television networks showed working-class whites made up 36% of the electorate, even with a notable drop in white voter turnout.

Last November, Obama won the votes of just 36% of those non-college whites, the worst performance

of any Democratic nominee among that group since Republican Ronald Reagan's 1984 landslide victory over Walter Mondale.

Some Democratic analysts have urged renewed efforts to bring working-class whites into the political fold, calling them a potential “decisive swing voter group” if minority and youth turnout level off in future elections. “In 2016, GOP messaging will be far more focused on expressing concern for ‘the middle class’ and ‘average Americans,’” Andrew Levison and Ruy Teixeira wrote recently in *The New Republic*.

“They don’t trust big government, but it doesn’t mean they want no government,” says Republican pollster Ed Goetas, who agrees that working-class whites will remain an important electoral group. “They feel that politicians are giving attention to other people and not them,” Goetas said. His research found that many of them would support anti-poverty programs if focused broadly on job training and infrastructure investment. Recently Obama pledged anew to help manufacturers bring jobs back

to America and to create jobs in the energy sectors of wind, solar and natural gas.

Hope Yen writes for AP and other publications.

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REASONS MEN DON'T WANT TO GET MARRIED

HELEN SMITH

It seems that fewer and fewer people in general are getting married these days, and even fewer men seem interested. Men no longer see marriage as being as important as they did even 15 years ago. "According to the Pew Research Center, the share of women ages eighteen to thirty-four that say having a successful marriage is one of the most important things in their lives rose nine percentage points since 1997--from 28 percent to 37 percent. For men, the opposite occurred. The share voicing this opinion dropped, from 35 percent to 29 percent." Why?

In the course of researching my new book, *Men on Strike: Why Men Are Boycotting Marriage, Fatherhood, and the American Dream—And Why It Matters*, I talked with heterosexual men all over America about why they're avoiding marriage. It turns out that the problem isn't that men are immature, or lazy. Instead, they're responding rationally to the incentives in today's society. Here are some of the answers I found.

1. You'll lose respect. A couple of generations ago, a man wasn't considered fully adult until he was married with kids. But today, fathers are figures of fun more than figures of respect: The schlubby guy with the flowered diaper bag at the mall, or one of the endless array of buffoonish TV dads in sitcoms and commercials. In today's culture, father never knows best. It's no better in the news media. As communications professor James Macnamara reports, "by volume, 69 percent of mass media reporting and commentary on men was unfavorable, compared with just 12 percent

favorable and 19 percent neutral or balanced."

2. You'll lose out on sex. Married men have more sex than single men, on average -- but much less than men who are cohabiting with their partners outside of marriage, especially as time goes on. Research even suggests that married women are more likely to gain weight than women who are cohabiting without mar-

riage. A *Men's Health* article mentioned one study that followed 2,737 people for six years and found that cohabiters said they were happier and more confident than married couples and singles.

3. You'll lose friends. "Those wedding bells are breaking up that old gang of mine." That's an old song, but it's true. When married, men's ties with friends from school and work tend to fade. Although both men and women lose friends after marriage, it tends to affect men's self-esteem more, perhaps because men tend to be less social in general.

4. You'll lose space. We hear a lot about men retreating to their "man caves," but why do they retreat? Because they've lost the battle for the rest of the house. The Art of Manliness blog mourns "The Decline of Male Space," and notes that the development of suburban lifestyles, intended to bring the family together, resulted in the elimination of male spaces in the main part of the house, and the exile of men to attics, garages, basements -- the least desirable part of the home.

As a commenter to the post observes: "There was no sadder scene to a mov-

It turns out that the problem isn't that men are immature, or lazy. Instead, they're responding rationally to the incentives in today's society.

-- Helen Smith

riage. A *Men's Health* article mentioned one study that followed 2,737



ie than in 'Juno' when married guy Jason Bateman realized that in his entire huge, house, he had only a large closet to keep all the stuff he loved in. That hit me like a punch in the face."

5. You could lose your kids, and your money. And they may not even be your kids. Lots of men I spoke with were keenly aware of the dangers of divorce, and worried that if they were married and it went sour, the woman might take everything, including the kids. Other men were concerned that they might wind up paying child support for kids who aren't even theirs -- a very real possibility in many states. On my blog, I polled over 3200 men to ask how they would react to finding out that a child wasn't theirs after all. 32 percent said they would feel "anger and fury at the mother," 6 percent said they would feel "depression," 18 percent said "anger and depression," 2 percent said "none of the above," 32 percent said "angry at the system that forced them to pay," and only 2 percent "didn't care." One man commented that his ex-wife had taunted him with the knowledge that his 11-year old son wasn't actually his: "I was angry at the mother...I severed all ties to the boy. Some may see this as a failing. I see it as self-preservation, and to those that ask the question of whether or not the courts will make a non-biological parent pay child support, pay attention: YES THEY WILL! They see you as nothing more than a source of cash for the child. It seems that a person in these situations should be able to sue the real father for child support."

6. You'll lose in court. Men often complain that the family court legal system is stacked against them, and in fact it seems to be. Women gain custody and child support the majority of the time, as pointed out in this ABC News article: "Despite the increases in men seeking and receiving alimony, advocates warn against linking the trend to equality in the courtroom. Family court judges still tend to favor women, said Ned Holstein, the founder of Fathers & Families, a group advocating family court reform. "Family court still gives custo-

dy overwhelmingly to mothers, child support overwhelmingly to mothers, and courts still give alimony overwhelmingly to mothers and women," he said. "The family courts came into existence years ago in order to give things to mothers that mothers needed," he said. "The times have changed and the courts have not."

7. You'll lose your freedom. At least, if you're charged with child support that you can't pay, you can be put in jail -- and if you can't afford a lawyer, you don't have the right to have one appointed because, according to the Supreme Court, it's technically a civil matter, never mind the jail time. Fathers and Families found that it's the men who are jailed rather than women: "A new report concludes that between 95 percent and 98.5 percent of all incarcerations in Massachusetts sentenced from the Massachusetts Probate and Family Courts from 2001 through 2011 have been men. Moreover, this percentage may be increasing, with an average of 94.5 percent from 2001 to 2008, and 96.2 percent from 2009 through 2011. It is likely that most of these incarcerations are for incomplete payment of child support. Further analysis suggests that women who fail to pay all of their child support are incarcerated only one-eighth as often as men with

similar violations."

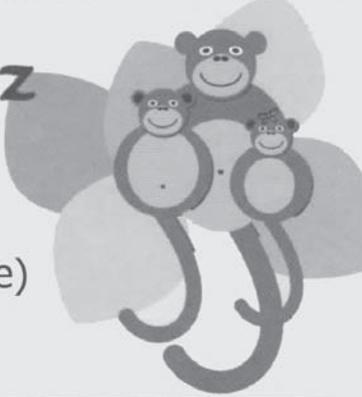
8. Single life is better than ever. While the value of marriage to men has declined, the quality of single life has improved. Single men were once looked on with suspicion, passed over for promotion for important jobs, which usually valued "stable family men," and often subjected to social opprobrium. It was hard to have a love life that wasn't aimed at marriage, and premarital sex was risky and frowned upon. Now, no one looks askance at the single lifestyle, dating is easy, and employers probably prefer employees with no conflicting family responsibilities. Plus, video games, cable TV, and the Internet provide entertainment that didn't used to be available. Is this good for society? Probably not, as falling birth rates and increasing single-motherhood demonstrate. But people respond to incentives. If you want more men to marry, it needs to be a more attractive proposition.

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