



## FRIENDS OF THE MIDDLE NEWSLETTER #45 — JAN. 5, 2012

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### **As Goes Montana, So Goes the Nation**

(posted by Steven W. Baker / SteveB, Jan. 5, 2012)

I'm so proud of this issue! And I'm so proud of my usually conservative adopted state of Montana, truly god's country.

What? Tiny Montana with only a million people in the entire, titanic state? Montana, fighting the U.S. Supreme Court's *Citizens United* decision almost single-handedly?

The reason why this is the case proves once again how important it is to study history. I know the Right wants to discard all history past, say 1890, but that will hardly be allowed by the rest of us.

Montana has a long history with *Citizens United*, in a way, going back to before 1912, when the state enacted laws to prevent political contributions from corporations. You see, before Montana passed this law and took their state back, conditions were the same as for the entire U.S. at this time, post-*Citizens United*. Corporations and big money could do whatever they wanted, and they did.

In Montana, this meant that the giant corporations owned Montana state government. Montana was probably the most corrupt place in the world in the early 1900's, largely because of the influence big money had on its politics. Sound familiar? Read a little history (also see SteveG, below, "*Citizens United* Unleashed a Monster"):

"*Citizens United* Backlash: Montana Supreme Court Upholds State's Corporate Campaign Spending Ban" by Mike Sacks, Huffington Post

Jan. 4, 2012, ([http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/01/04/citizens-united-montana-supreme-court-corporate-spending\\_n\\_1182168.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/01/04/citizens-united-montana-supreme-court-corporate-spending_n_1182168.html))

(WASHINGTON) The Montana Supreme Court has put itself on a collision course with the U.S. Supreme Court by upholding a century-old state law (<http://applicationengine.mt.gov/getContent?vsId=%7b1C0B7886-01C0-49E3-A71A-C06CA7E71040%7d&impersonate=true&objectStoreName=PROD%20OBJECT%20STORE&objectType=document>) that bans corporate spending in state and local political campaigns.

The law, which was passed by Montana voters in 1912 to combat Gilded Age corporate control over much of Montana's government, states that a "corporation may not make ... an expenditure in connection with a candidate or a political party that supports or opposes a candidate or a political party." In 2010, the U.S. Supreme Court, in its

landmark *Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission* decision (<http://www.law.cornell.edu/supct/html/08-205.ZS.html>), struck down a similar federal statute, holding that independent electoral spending by corporations "do not give rise to corruption or the appearance of corruption" that such laws were enacted to combat.

That reasoning -- described by the *Citizens United* dissenters as a "crabbed view of corruption" (<http://www.law.cornell.edu/supct/html/08-205.ZX.html>) -- compelled 23 of the 24 states with independent spending bans to stop enforcing their restrictions, according to Edwin Bender, executive director of the Helena, Mont.-based National Institute on Money in State Politics (<http://www.followthemoney.org/>). Montana, however, stood by its 1912 law, which led several corporations to challenge it as unconstitutional.

By a 5-2 vote this past Friday, the Montana Supreme Court declined to recognize the common understanding that *Citizens United* bars all laws limiting independent electoral spending. Instead, Chief Justice Mike McGrath, writing on behalf of the majority, called on the history surrounding the state law to show that corporate money, even if not directly contributed to a campaign, can give rise to corruption.

McGrath's opinion in *Western Tradition Partnership v. Attorney General* harkens back to the turn of the 20th century, when Montana's "Copper Kings" ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Copper\\_Kings](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Copper_Kings)) -- the natural resource-rich state's version of the robber barons -- competed "for political and economic domination" so effectively that by the time the Montana voters banned corporate spending in a voter initiative, "the State of Montana and its government were operating under a mere shell of legal authority." One such Copper King, wrote Mark Twain in a quotation cited by McGrath, was "said to have bought legislatures and judges as other men buy food and raiment."

Paul S. Ryan, associate legal counsel at the Campaign Legal Center (<http://www.campaignlegalcenter.org/>), characterized the Montana Supreme Court's reliance on factual findings culled from a century of state history, plus the trial testimony from contemporary politicians of both parties, as "an antidote to the crabbed view of corruption" adopted in *Citizens United*. Nevertheless, most observers, including Ryan, do not anticipate the U.S. Supreme Court accepting that antidote. The ruling in *Citizens United* that independent spending does not give rise to corruption introduced a categorical rule that no factual reality can overcome as long as the decision's five-justice majority remains on the Court.

To make this point, dissenting state Justice Beth Baker wrote that Montana "made no more compelling a case than that painstakingly presented in the 90-page dissenting opinion of Justice [John Paul] Stevens and emphatically rejected by the majority in *Citizens United*."

And state Justice James Nelson, also dissenting, put the point more bluntly. Even while lambasting *Citizens United's* reasoning as "utter nonsense" and "smoke and mirrors," among other insults, he found himself duty-bound to defer to the decision of the highest court in the land. "The Supreme Court in *Citizens United* rejected several asserted governmental interests," wrote Nelson, "and this Court has now come along, retrieved those interests from the garbage can, dusted them off, slapped a 'Made in Montana' sticker on them, and held them up as grounds for sustaining a patently unconstitutional state statute."

Nelson wrote that it "would not surprise me in the least" if the U.S. Supreme Court reversed his court's decision without even asking for briefs or oral argument from the opposing parties.

To reverse the Montana Supreme Court, however, the justices would have to extract themselves from a quandary of their own making, noted professor Rick Hasen (<http://electionlawblog.org/?p=27232>) of the University of California-Irvine Law School on his popular Election Law Blog. "If the Court were being honest in *Citizens United*," Hasen wrote, "it would have said something like: We don't care whether or not independent spending can or cannot corrupt; the First Amendment trumps this risk of corruption."

But by "dress[ing] up its value judgment ... as a factual statement," continued Hasen, the U.S. Supreme Court must now explain why the Montana Supreme Court was not correct to consider the factual record when it came to justifying corporate spending limits in campaign finance laws.

How the *Citizens United* majority will deny the force of Montana's factual record or, for that matter, Mark Twain's observations -- and whether the *Citizens United* dissenters will express their schadenfreude at their colleagues' efforts -- remains hypothetical for now. Donald Ferguson, executive director of lead plaintiff American Tradition

Partnership (formerly known as Western Tradition Partnership), wrote in an email to HuffPost that his organization has "not yet made a decision on future actions regarding the suit."

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I am so glad that I don't have to hear any more about Iowa. What a total waste of time and money. The sheer number of talking heads and all the words wasted in the endless coverage. Meanwhile the world and this country have real problems which desperately need to be addressed. There are still children starving in Congo. Sorry for the rant. I will never make it till November.

<a href="#">20120104-03</a>	12:07	SteveB	Re: 2012 Republican Primaries—Iowa (reply to Beth, above)
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I'm smiling...it can get to be a little much...I can never find those statistics on how many people simply explode sometime before the election actually rolls around, but there have to be at least a few.

Did you get a chance to watch the cool video about the guy from India providing education to, well, not "children starving in the Congo," but poor Indian villagers?

Thank you for all your comments! Hope you have a great 2012!

What would you like to talk about? What's #1

[20120104-06](#) 12:34 Beth Re: 2012 Republican Primaries—Iowa (reply to SteveB, above)

Tom Friedman had an interesting column in the *Times* this morning about how the right questions are not being asked of the candidates, particularly with regard to technology. I guess the problem is that the vision of the USA that the GOP embraces is the "old" country of the white middle class, not the country that we need to become to maintain our place in the world. Backwards is not where we need to go.

[20120104-02](#) 11:31 Art Re: R0mney\* (Yawn!) Wins Iowa (reply to SteveB, FotM Newsletter # 44)

Hi, Steve. Good stuff again as usual. You know you are setting a pretty high standard for the future.

One note on the key article. I think both the Internet outpouring of vitriolic hate and now the Super PACs, which - cannot bring myself to use who - are not accountable to anyone, can spew whatever hate and personal attacks they wish and the candidates can all claim "It wasn't me!!!" The problem is there is always a certain percentage of the population who believe some or all of the information in these attacks. It is evident by the almost unbelievable rise and fall of the Republican candidates over very short periods.

However the fallout from all these personal attacks is a growing distaste and outright vicious dislike for the candidates, all of them eventually. I think that is what has happened to President Obama. There are people who simply loath him, yet when you ask them why, they cannot provide any coherent reasons. Nonetheless the hatred exists. Now try running the country with that on your shoulders. The real problem too is it won't go away. Seemingly once people have turned some corner in their minds, that's it, the guy or gal is a low life dirtbag (sorry, I just don't have Pam's extreme vocabulary) and that is all there is to it.

My concern is, no matter who wins, they will enter office with a fair chunk of the country simply loathing them. Not good for anyone.

[20120104-04](#) 12:09 SteveB Re: R0mney\* (Yawn!) Wins Iowa (reply to Art, above)

I think you're exactly right. That was one of the main points I wanted to get across...the lasting effects of all the money and poison...I think you put it better than I did.

[20120104-05](#) 12:20 Art "No Longer the Land of Opportunity"

"No Longer the Land of Opportunity" by Harold Meyerson, *The Washington Post*

Jan. 3, 2012, ([http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/no-longer-the-land-of-opportunity/2012/01/02/qIQAQJVDZP\\_story.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/no-longer-the-land-of-opportunity/2012/01/02/qIQAQJVDZP_story.html))

"Over the past three years, Barack Obama has been replacing our merit-based society with an Entitlement Society," Mitt Romney wrote in *USA Today* last month. The coming election, Romney told *Wall Street Journal* editors last month, will be "a very simple choice" between Obama's "European social democratic" vision and "a merit-based

opportunity society — an American-style society — where people earn their rewards based on their education, their work, their willingness to take risks and their dreams.”

Romney’s assertions are the centerpiece of his, and his party’s, critique not just of Obama but of American liberalism generally. But they fail to explain how and why the American economy has declined the past few decades — in good part because they betray no awareness that Europe’s social democracies now fit the description of “merit-based opportunity societies” much more than ours does.

The best way to measure a nation’s merit-based status is to look at its intergenerational economic mobility: Do children move up and down the economic ladder based on their own abilities, or does their economic standing simply replicate their parents’? Sadly, as the American middle class has thinned out over recent decades, the idea of America as the land of opportunity has become a farce. As a paper by Julia Isaacs of the Brookings Institution has shown, sons’ earnings approximate those of their fathers about three times more frequently in the United States than they do in Denmark, Norway and Finland, and about 11 / 2 times more frequently than they do in Germany. The European social democracies — where taxes, entitlements and the rate of unionization greatly exceed America’s — are demonstrably more merit-based than the United States.

That’s hardly the only measure by which Europe’s social democracies demonstrate more dynamism than our increasingly sclerotic plutocracy. Unemployment rates in Northern European nations — as of October, Germany’s unemployment rate was 6.5 percent; the Netherlands, 4.8 percent; Sweden 7.4 percent — are substantially lower than ours (9 percent then). Denmark, Sweden, Finland and Germany in particular have sizable trade surpluses, while the United States runs the largest trade deficits in human history.

There are, of course, a multitude of reasons the nations of Northern Europe are outperforming us. But if entitlements and social democracy were anywhere near the impediments to enterprise that Romney claims, Germany would hardly be the most successful economy in the advanced industrial world, with those of Scandinavia close behind.

The secrets of social democracy’s successes are in plain view. In Scandinavia, government commitment to worker retraining and job relocation mean that there is no major political pressure to keep failing firms in business; it’s a policy that favors innovative start-ups. In Germany, management and unions cooperate to upgrade their products and their processes — partly because corporate boards consist of equal numbers of management and worker representatives. Germany’s surge in exports may be partly attributable to its union workers agreeing to hold their wages flat (at levels still well above those of their U.S. counterparts). But their workers’ willingness to sacrifice in order to stay competitive is surely increased by the fact that their CEOs on average make just 11 times as much as their workers. In the United States, chief executives make roughly 200 to 300 times (choose your survey) as much as their average employees’ salary.

Which brings us back to Romney’s characterization of our country as a merit-based society and his failure to notice the huge changes in economic rewards over the past three decades. During the 30 years after World War II, the average American family’s income doubled, while chief executives’ income was restrained, increasing by less than 1 percent annually, according to a 2010 paper by economists Carola Frydman and Raven Saks. Beginning around 1980, however, as unions were smashed, industry moved offshore and executive pay skyrocketed, the incomes of most Americans began to flatten or decline, while financiers and corporate leaders were able to claim more and more of the nation’s income for themselves.

Corporate leaders have been rewarded with huge payouts even when their corporation’s performance has been disappointing. Conversely, millions of Americans have maintained or upgraded their skills yet seen their jobs shipped abroad or downgraded. Is this a description of a merit-based society? How does it compare with that of mid-century America, when the rewards for work were distributed more broadly?

Romney and his Bain Capital buddies may view their wealth as the just rewards endemic to successful people in a merit-based society. But why are so few Americans sharing in those rewards today while so many Americans shared in them 40 years ago? Are most Americans no longer meritorious? Or has our country ceased to reward any but the rich and powerful?

I just stumbled across something I was trying the other day to remember: Irving Kristol's quip that "neoconservatives were liberals who'd been mugged by reality." (Mark Lilla, NYRB 1/12/12) In his essay "Republicans for Revolution" Mark Lilla raises a crucial point that the main difference between the Left and the Right is "the quarrel over the nature of human beings and their relation to society [which comes first-- society or the individual?]. The quarrel between revolutionaries and reactionaries...has little to do with nature. It is a quarrel over history." Lilla describes two kinds of reactionaries, those who dream of a return to an Edenic past ("restorative reactionaries") and those who take for granted that the revolution has taken place, with no going back. The only sane response to what they see as an apocalypse is to create another and hope that a phoenix will rise from the ashes ("redemptive reactionaries"). The Republican party is now the party of redemption, hence the emphasis on moral absolutes, "taking back" America, and destroying the current system that grew out of the labor movements of the 'thirties and the discontents of the 'sixties. Redemptive reactionaries, whether they are religiously motivated or politically committed, all want to see the "old" order swept away and a new, clean, pure America re-created as a shining city upon the hill. The mythic past is substituted for reality and an ideal of purity--of whatever kind--is seen as the sole standard of governance.

We pragmatists keep harping on "policy" and "solutions," but I now realize those are not even blips on the Right's radar. They believe that if they can restore the moral integrity of America, the problems will solve themselves, if indeed they are problems and not just scare tactics of the Left. I don't know this for a fact, but I would guess that there are very few secular tea baggers. The whole aim of the Right is to clear the way for a theocratic system that will restore the nuclear family, promote Christian marriage, marginalize gays, and "save the soul of America". (Their words.) The political dogmatists, which would include the moneyed interests as well as libertarians, cynically make common cause with their right-wing compatriots. There are really two philosophies at work here: one that advances a theological agenda and one that just wants to take the brakes off business.

There's not much we can do or say to the religionists. Their minds are not open to argument, as reason has little to do with their beliefs. The dogmatists are reachable, however, if they can be persuaded that what benefits our whole society will benefit them as well. Obama is accused of being a "secular, European socialist," which ignores the fact that Germany and the Scandinavian countries are way ahead of us in just about any measure of well-being you can think of. Their CEOs make roughly 11 times what a worker on the factory floor makes; ours make around 200-300 times as much. German and Scandinavian unemployment rates are way below ours, and there is far more social mobility--based on merit--than we have. We have become like the old Europe, where wealth and power were inherited--quite a reversal I'd say.

To quote Lilla again, "People who know what kind of new world they want to create through revolution are trouble enough; those who only know what they want to destroy are a curse."

When I started this, my intention was to discuss the role of religion in society the world over, but I'll stop here and pick that up in another post.

I think you are onto it. Compromise used to be a good word. And now it seems to be you give into my way of thinking and we have compromised – please refer to anything that Eric Kantor says. "Retaking our country" also means our/my definition of our country and returning to our constitution means my interpretation of the constitution.

George the W made the statement numerous times that "Either you are with us or against us". The phrase may have been slightly different, but he was using it to get us into the invasion of Iraq that would pay for itself and just take a few days or weeks. We all know how well that worked. The phrase has continued to be a part of our every day life, particularly from the neoconservative side. And now we fight each other.



20120104-09

14:19

SteveB

Re: Revolutionaries & Reactionaries (reply to Pam, above) & "Republicans for Revolution"

I love it, Art and Pam! This is exactly the paradigm of what is happening. Pam is right. This is the wellspring of causes and solutions.

Here's the whole book review, though Pam's summary might be better. I'd love to read the book too.

"Republicans for Revolution" by Mark Lilla, *The New York Review of Books*

Jan. 12, 2012, (<http://www.nybooks.com/articles/archives/2012/jan/12/republicans-revolution/?pagination=false>)

(*The Reactionary Mind: Conservatism from Edmund Burke to Sarah Palin*, by Corey Robin, Oxford University Press, 290 pp., \$29.95) [Art would like this! –SteveB]



Republican presidential candidates Ron Paul, Rick Perry, Mitt Romney, Herman Cain, Newt Gingrich, and Michele Bachmann during the National Anthem before a debate, Washington, D.C., November 22, 2011

In 2004, then Senator Barack Obama brought the Democratic Party convention to its feet by declaring that there is "not a liberal America and a conservative America—there's the United States of America." He learned differently. As Princeton historian Sean Wilentz wrote recently in *The New Republic*, the American fantasy of a postpartisan politics runs back to the earliest days of the republic.<sup>1</sup> Politicians who exploited it for their own purposes did well; those who genuinely believed in it failed. And it's a good thing, too. Modern democracy depends on distinctions among factions, principles, and programs, the clearer the better.

But the current public dissatisfaction with our parties is not just about partisanship. It also reflects a sense that the labels we use to distinguish factions, principles, and programs have lost their value. What does it mean to call oneself a liberal or conservative today? Does it make sense to distinguish "progressives" and "reactionaries," or are those just terms of abuse and self-flattery? It's hard to know how to talk about the new classes of rich and poor created by the global economy, and their strangely overlapping political commitments. Or where on the linguistic map to put the new populisms spawning around the world, some anti-global, some anti-immigrant, some libertarian, some authoritarian. Words are failing us.

Though it sounds dull, we actually need taxonomy. It is what renders the political present legible to us. Getting it right, though, requires a certain art, a kind of dispassionate alertness and historical perspective, a sense of the moment, and a sense that this, too, shall pass. Political scientists, intent on aping the methods of the hard sciences, stopped cultivating this art half a century ago, just as things started getting interesting, as new kinds of political movements and coalitions were developing in democratic societies. We're in a similar moment now; we need a guide. That's why Corey Robin's *The Reactionary Mind* is a useful book to have—not as an example to follow, but one to avoid.

Robin, who teaches political science at Brooklyn College, has been writing thoughtful essays on the American right for *The Nation* and other publications over the past decade. *The Reactionary Mind* collects profiles of well-known right-wing thinkers like Ayn Rand, Barry Goldwater, and Justice Antonin Scalia, and some deserters who turned left, like John Gray and Edward Luttwak. There are also a few that look beyond our borders, including an excellent piece on Hobbes as a counterrevolutionary thinker. But the book aims to be more than a collection. It is conceived as a major statement on conservatism and reaction, from the eighteenth century to the present. And this is where it disappoints.

The problems begin in the opening paragraphs, where Robin lays out his general picture of political history. It is not overly complex:

Since the modern era began, men and women in subordinate positions have marched against their superiors in the state, church, workplace, and other hierarchical institutions. They have gathered under different banners—the labor movement, feminism, abolition, socialism—and shouted different slogans: freedom, equality, rights, democracy, revolution. In virtually every instance, their superiors have resisted them, violently and nonviolently, legally and illegally, overtly and covertly.... Despite the very real differences between them, workers in a factory are like secretaries in an office, peasants on a manor, slaves on a plantation—even wives in a marriage—in that they live and labor in conditions of unequal power.

This is history as WPA mural, and will be familiar to anyone who lived through the Thirties, remembers the Sixties, or was made to read historians like Howard Zinn, Arno Mayer, E.P. Thompson, Eric Hobsbawm, and Christopher Hill at school. In their tableau, history's *damnés de la terre* are brought together into a single heroic image of suffering and resistance. Their hats are white, immaculately so. Off in the distance are what appear to be black-hatted villains, though their features are difficult to make out. Sometimes they have little identification tags like those the personified vices wear in medieval frescoes—"capital," "men," "whites," "the state," "the old regime"—but we get no idea what they are after or what their stories are. Not that it matters. To understand the oppressed and side with them all you need to know is that there are oppressors.

What distinguishes Robin from the old-style left historians is that he's genuinely interested in the right and wants to paint its portrait—though, again, he's committed to keeping it simple. In fact, he thinks that much of our confusion about this subject stems from the fact that we have been taken in by conservative intellectuals who lay out benign-sounding political principles, and historians who accept them as defining different streams of right-wing thought and activity. Robin will have none of it. To his mind, the fundamental truth about the right is that it has always wanted one and only one thing: to keep down those who are already down. This is what unites Edmund Burke and Sarah Palin:

Conservatism is the theoretical voice of this animus against the agency of the subordinate classes. It provides the most consistent and profound argument as to why the lower orders should not be allowed to exercise their independent will, why they should not be allowed to govern themselves or the polity. Submission is their first duty, agency, the prerogative of the elite.

If you accept these claims, then you will have no trouble accepting what Robin says in the book's most extraordinary paragraph:

I use the words conservative, reactionary, and counterrevolutionary interchangeably: not all counterrevolutionaries are conservative...but all conservatives are, in one way or another, counterrevolutionary. I seat philosophers, statesmen, slaveholders, scribblers, Catholics, fascists,



evangelicals, businessmen, racists, and hacks at the same table: Hobbes next to Hayek, Burke across from Palin, Nietzsche between Ayn Rand and Antonin Scalia, with Adams, Calhoun, Oakeshott, Ronald Reagan, Tocqueville, Theodore Roosevelt, Margaret Thatcher, Ernst Jünger, Carl Schmitt, Winston Churchill, Phyllis Schlafly, Richard Nixon, Irving Kristol, Francis Fukuyama, and George W. Bush interspersed throughout.

Glenn Beck's blackboard was never half this full.

Robin is a lumpner, an *über*-lumpner, which may please his beleaguered readers on the left, but makes his entire enterprise incoherent. He fails to see that it is based on a glaring fallacy of composition: he posits a class, isolates a characteristic of one of its members, and then ascribes that characteristic to every member of the class. Catholic reactionary Joseph de Maistre and George W. Bush are both on the right in Robin's scheme; following his logic, since Maistre spoke flawless French, Bush must too. Which would be some national secret. Yet that's exactly how Robin proceeds, until he has corralled everyone he doesn't like into a pen and labeled them all conservatives and reactionaries and right-wingers, terms he fails to distinguish. (More on that in a moment.)

But if there's anything we've learned over the past century, it is that *la destra è mobile*. The right used to be isolationist, then became internationalist, and to judge by recent Republican debates may be tiptoeing back to isolationism again. In the 1970s, if you thought that public schools were being used for social indoctrination, that power over them should be decentralized, and that children would be better off learning at home, that put you on the far left. Today those views put you on the right. Are we to think that these shifts were only about how best to keep power from the people?

And what about all the factionalism within the right? Isolationist paleoconservatives at magazines like *The American Conservative* hate "American greatness" neoconservatives at *The Weekly Standard* for their expansionist foreign policies and unconditional support of Israel, and the feeling is mutual. Theocoonservatives at the journal *First Things* who resist gay marriage drive libertarians at the Cato Institute up the wall. There are serious and consequential disagreements on the right today over immigration, defense spending, the Wall Street bailouts, the tax code, state surveillance, and much else. Who wins those arguments could very well determine what this country looks like a generation from now. Robin registers none of this.

An opportunity has been missed. Robin is not wrong to think there are two tribes in modern politics, and the terms "right" and "left" are as good as any other to describe them. But within each tribe there are clans that do more than express more radical or moderate versions of the same outlook. Most of the turmoil in American politics recently is the result of changes in the clan structure of the right, with the decline of reality-based conservatives like William F. Buckley and George Will and the ascendancy of new populist reactionaries like Glenn Beck, Ann Coulter, and other Tea Party favorites. To understand why the distinction between them still matters, we need to remind ourselves what the terms "conservative" and "reactionary" originally meant.

"Liberal" and "conservative" first became labels for political tendencies in the aftermath of the French Revolution. Like all polemical terms their meaning and usage shifted around in partisan debate, but the philosophical distinction between them was settled by the mid-nineteenth century, thanks in large part to Edmund Burke. After the Revolution, Burke argued that what really separated its partisans and opponents were not atheism and faith, or democracy and aristocracy, or even equality and hierarchy, but instead two very different understandings of human nature. Burke believed that, since human beings are born into a functioning world populated by others, society is—to use a large word he wouldn't—metaphysically prior to the individuals in it. The unit of political life is society, not individuals, who need to be seen as instances of the societies they inhabit.

What makes conservatives conservative are the implications they have drawn from Burke's view of society. Conservatives have always seen society as a kind of inheritance we receive and are responsible for; we have obligations toward those who came before and to those who will come after, and these obligations take priority over our rights. Conservatives have also been inclined to assume, along with Burke, that this inheritance is best passed on implicitly through slow changes in custom and tradition, not through explicit political action. Conservatives loyal to Burke are not hostile to change, only to doctrines and principles that do violence to preexisting opinions and institutions, and open the door to despotism. This was the deepest basis of Burke's critique of the French Revolution; it was not simply a defense of privilege.

Though philosophical liberalism traces its roots back to the Wars of Religion, the term “liberal” was not used as a partisan label until the Spanish constitutionalists took it over in the early nineteenth century. And it was only later, in its confrontation with conservatism, that liberalism achieved ideological clarity. Classical liberals like John Stuart Mill, in contrast to conservatives, give individuals priority over society, on anthropological as well as moral grounds. They assume that societies are genuinely constructs of human freedom, that whatever we inherit from them, they can always be unmade or remade through free human action. This assumption, more than any other, shapes the liberal temperament. It is what makes liberals suspicious of appeals to custom or tradition, given that they have so often been used to justify privilege and injustice. Liberals, like conservatives, recognize the need for constraints, but believe they must come from principles that transcend particular societies and customs. Principles are the only legitimate constraints on our freedom.

The quarrel between liberals and conservatives is essentially a quarrel over the nature of human beings and their relation to society. The quarrel between revolutionaries and reactionaries, on the other hand, has little to do with nature. It is a quarrel over history.

The term “reaction” migrated from the natural sciences into European political thought in the mid-eighteenth century, thanks to Montesquieu, who had picked it up from Newton. Originally, though, it was not associated with the concept of revolutions, which were then thought to be rare and unpredictable events, not part of some process of historical unfolding. That changed in 1789, when partisans of the French Revolution squared off against those who spoke openly of a Counter-Revolution that would set the world aright. The euphoria of rebellion, the collapse of the Old Regime, the Terror, and the subsequent rise of Napoleon gave history a secular eschatological charge, which destroyed many of the remaining moderates. For European radicals, the French Revolution was a cosmic epiphany that began an unstoppable process of collective human self-emancipation. For reactionaries, too, it was an apocalyptic event, signaling the end of a process that had placed Catholic Europe at the summit of world civilizations. One group saw a radiant future, the other saw nothing but the deluge. But revolutionaries and reactionaries did agree on one thing: that thinking seriously about politics means thinking about the course of history, not human nature.

There have always been two kinds of reactionaries, though, with different attitudes toward historical change. One type dreams of a return to some real or imaginary state of perfection that existed before a revolution. This can be any sort of revolution—political, religious, economic, or even aesthetic. French aristocrats who hoped to restore the Bourbon dynasty, Russian Old Believers who wanted to recover early Orthodox Christian rites, Pre-Raphaelite painters who rejected the conventions of Mannerism, Morrisites and Ruskinites who raged against the machine, all these were what you might call restorative reactionaries.

A second type—call them redemptive reactionaries—take for granted that the revolution is a *fait accompli* and that there is no going back. But they are not historical pessimists, or not entirely. They believe that the only sane response to an apocalypse is to provoke another, in hopes of starting over. Ever since the French Revolution reactionaries have seen themselves working toward counterrevolutions that would destroy the present state of affairs and transport the nation, or the faith, or the entire human race to some new Golden Age that would redeem aspects of the past without returning there.

This was the shared vision of Joseph de Maistre, the most bloody-minded of the French counterrevolutionaries, and twentieth-century European fascists. Fascists hated so many aspects of modern society—representative democracy, capitalism, cosmopolitanism, tolerance, bourgeois refinement—that we forget they were anything but nostalgic for Church and Crown. They had contempt for weak German aristocrats with their dueling scars and precious manners, and reserved their nostalgia for a new Rome to be brought into being through storms of steel. There was nothing conservative about them.

Americans’ assumptions about human nature are basically liberal today. We take it for granted that we are born free, that we constitute society, it doesn’t constitute us, and that together we legitimately govern ourselves. Most intellectuals who call themselves conservatives today accept as self-evident the truths enumerated in the Declaration of Independence, which no traditional European conservative could. Some of them have drawn from European conservatism when they write about the constructive role of civil society, the habits and mores needed to exercise liberty, and the limits of government action. But strictly speaking, they are go-slow, curb-your-enthusiasm liberals like Tocqueville, not conservatives like Burke or T.S. Eliot or Michael Oakeshott. As for those like

Congressman Ron Paul who promote a minimal state and an unregulated economy, their libertarianism is actually a mutation of early liberalism, not conservatism. This is important to bear in mind.

On questions of history, however, Americans are all over the map. As we were reminded in the run-up to the last Iraq war, every now and then the prophetic strain in our political rhetoric inspires eschatological fantasies of democratic avant-gardism, with Lady Liberty replacing the French Marianne on top of history's barricades. Then reality intrudes and Americans revert to the converse fantasy of American exceptionalism, which must be protected from history through isolation and self-purification. We have also had our share of restorative reactionaries, from Southern nostalgics for the ol' plantation, to agrarian despisers of the great American cities, to racist despisers of the immigrants they attracted, to no-government oddballs who think they can go it alone, to trust-fund hippies who went back to the land, to lock-and-load eco-terrorists who want to take us off the grid (after they recharge their Macs). What we have not seen much of, except on the fringes of American politics, are redemptive reactionaries who think the only way forward is to destroy what history has given us and wait for a new order to emerge out of the chaos. At least until now.

The real news on the American right is the mainstreaming of political apocalypticism. This has been brewing among intellectuals since the Nineties, but in the past four years, thanks to the right-wing media establishment and economic collapse, it has reached a wider public and transformed the Republican Party. How that happened would be a long story to tell, and central to it would be the remarkable transmutation of neoconservatism from intellectual movement to rabble-rousing Republican court ideology. The first neoconservatives were disappointed liberals like Irving Kristol and Nathan Glazer, who saw the failures of a large number of Great Society programs to deliver on the unrealistic expectations of its architects, and consequently began to appreciate the wisdom of certain conservative assumptions about human nature and politics. Kristol's famous quip that neoconservatives were liberals who'd been mugged by reality captured the original temperament.

Sometime in the Eighties, though, neoconservative thinking took on a darker hue. The big question was no longer how to adapt liberal aspirations to the limits of politics, but how to undo the cultural revolution of the Sixties that, in their eyes, had destabilized the family, popularized drug use, made pornography widely available, and encouraged public incivility. In other words, how to undo history. At first, neoconservatives writing in publications like *Commentary* and *The Public Interest* (which I once helped to edit) portrayed themselves as standing with "ordinary Americans" against the "adversary culture of intellectuals," and to that end promoted "family values" and religious beliefs they did not necessarily share, but thought socially useful. Yet by the Nineties, when it became apparent that lots of ordinary Americans had adjusted to the cultural changes, neoconservatives began predicting the End Times, and once-sober writers like Gertrude Himmelfarb and Robert Bork started publishing books with titles like *On Looking into the Abyss* and *Slouching Towards Gomorrah*.

The new apocalypticism reached a fever pitch in a symposium published in 1996 in the widely read theoconservative journal *First Things*, edited by the late Richard John Neuhaus. The special issue bore the title "The End of Democracy? The Judicial Usurpation of Politics," and was provoked by a court decision on physician-assisted suicide. The opening editorial put the following question before readers: Given that "law, as it is presently made by the judiciary, has declared its independence from morality," and that, due to judicial activism, "the government of the United States of America no longer governs by the consent of the governed," have we "reached or are [we] reaching the point where conscientious citizens can no longer give moral assent to the existing regime," and therefore must consider responses "ranging from noncompliance to resistance to civil disobedience to morally justified revolution"? To raise such a question, the editors insisted, "is in no way hyperbolic."<sup>2</sup>

This is the voice of high-brow reaction, and it was present on the right a good decade before Glenn Beck and his fellow prophets of populist doom began ringing alarm bells about educated elites in media, government, and the universities leading a velvet socialist revolution that only "ordinary Americans" could forestall. Apocalypticism trickled down, not up, and is now what binds Republican Party elites to their hard-core base. They all agree that the country must be "taken back" from the usurpers by any means necessary, and are willing to support any candidate, no matter how unworldly or unqualified or fanatical, who shares their picture of the crisis of our time. In the early Sixties, the patrician William F. Buckley joked that he would rather be governed by the first two thousand people in the Boston phonebook than by the combined faculties of Harvard and MIT. In 2010, former *Commentary* editor Norman Podhoretz wrote in *The Wall Street Journal* that "I would rather be ruled by the Tea Party than by the

Democratic Party, and I would rather have Sarah Palin sitting in the Oval Office than Barack Obama." This from a former student of Lionel Trilling. And he wasn't joking.

Seen in this context, the current deadlock in Washington does not look so surprising. During the 2010 congressional election campaign, Republican candidates (and some Democrats) were put under enormous pressure to sign the Americans for Tax Reform "Taxpayer Protection Pledge," which obliges them to oppose any increase in the marginal personal or corporate tax rate, and any limits on deductions or tax credits that aren't offset by other tax cuts. To date, all but six Republican representatives and seven senators have signed this collective suicide note, making the group's president, Grover Norquist, nearly as successful as Reverend Jim Jones. That's how the apocalyptic mind works, though. It convinces people that if they bring everything down around them, a phoenix will inevitably be born.

The same faith has been expressed in the Republican presidential candidate debates, where the contenders compete to demonstrate how many agencies they would abolish when in office (if they remember their names), how many programs they would cut or starve, and how much faith they have in the ingenuity of the American people to figure it out for themselves once they're finished. What's so disturbing is that they don't feel compelled to explain how even a reduced government should meet the challenges of the new global economy, how our educational system should respond to them, what the geopolitical implications might be, or anything of the sort. They deliver their lines with the insouciant "what, me worry?" of Alfred E. Neuman.

All this is new—and it has little to do with the principles of conservatism, or with the aristocratic prejudice that "some are fit, and thus ought, to rule others," which Corey Robin sees at the root of everything on the right. No, there is something darker and dystopic at work here. People who know what kind of new world they want to create through revolution are trouble enough; those who only know what they want to destroy are a curse. When I read the new reactionaries or hear them speak I'm reminded of Leo Naphta, the consumptive furloughed Jesuit in Thomas Mann's *The Magic Mountain*, who prowls the corridors of a Swiss sanatorium, raging against the modern Enlightenment and looking for disciples. What infuriates Naphta is that history cannot be reversed, so he dreams of revenge against it. He speaks of a coming apocalypse, a period of cruelty and cleansing, after which man's original ignorance will return and new forms of authority will be established. Mann did not model Naphta on Edmund Burke or Chateaubriand or Bismarck or any other figure on the traditional European right. He modeled him on George Lukács, the Hungarian Communist philosopher and onetime commissar who loathed liberals and conservatives alike. A man for our time.

<sup>1</sup>"The Mirage: The Long and Tragical History of Post-Partisanship, from Washington to Obama," *The New Republic*, November 17, 2011.

<sup>2</sup>*First Things*, November 1996. On the background to this bizarre episode, see Damon Linker, *The Theocons* (Doubleday, 2006), Chapter 3.

20120104-11	15:09	Pam	Re: Revolutionaries & Reactionaries (reply to all, above)
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I have a writer/philosopher/neuroscientist to recommend to all of you: Sam Harris. He's written a number of books, including *Letter to a Christian Nation*, and has a blog and newsletter I've just started following. Today I read his interview with Lawrence Krauss, whose new book *A Universe from Nothing* has just come out. Krauss is a physicist, which means that every other word out of his mouth is incomprehensible to me, but I get his essential point: we may discover through science that the universe in fact came from nothing, or we may find it is part of a multi-verse. Either way, there is no scientific reason to think there had to be a "creator." As Krauss says, the universe is the way it is, whether we like it or not. Of course, we don't know everything, probably never will, but that is no reason to delude ourselves with fantasies that purport to explain the inexplicable.

We've talked a lot about politics, but religion is an important part of any such discussion, especially these days. I don't just mean Rick Perry's evangelicalism or Newt's new-found Catholicism. ALL religions have within them the possibility of violence, if not the actual thing. The danger is believing in absolutes--absolute truth, an absolute god, the absolute meaning of life. Absolutes invite defending; after all, anything else is error that needs correcting. Europeans stopped burning heretics by the 17th c. (a bit into the 18th?), Americans stopped burning witches, and

there are now at least laws in India prohibiting the immolation of widows. To my knowledge, only Islam still threatens death for unbelief, though the Irish are not entirely blameless. Jonathan Swift had it so right in *Gulliver's Travels*. Human beings struggle over meaningless things, while the universe sails indifferently on.

You're all probably convinced by now that I am a certifiable paranoid who sees a menace around every corner. Believe me, I'm trying not to be. But I do feel threatened by religion, the hatred and intolerance it breeds, and the crushing of dissidence it leads to. I am not persuaded that just because some (many) Christians, Jews, and Muslims are good people with benign intentions religion is not at its root pernicious. There were good Soviets and good Germans too, but personal rectitude is no substitute for communal justice. To those who say there is no morality without god, I say, ridiculous. Sam Harris defines morality as that which conduces to well-being--pretty broad but all inclusive. I do not love my grandchildren because god tells me to (I'm adopting Christopher Hitchens' tradition of not capitalizing god). I do not want hungry children fed or Afghan women freed because god tells me to. I don't know if human beings are inherently moral or not, but I do know that religion and morality, while they may overlap, are not identical. That's why any expression of overt religiosity makes me uneasy. I tend to agree with Marx that "religion is the opiate of the people," though I suppose I don't mean that in the same way he does. I see that religion gives many people a sense of purpose and meaning, of protection, of aesthetic pleasure, of community, but, again, all those qualities can and do exist independent from a deity.

I say, let's get our sense of purpose from caring for our families and friends; our sense of meaning from nature and other people; our sense of protection from a sound justice system and an adequately funded police force; our sense of aesthetic pleasure from music and art; our sense of community from the people who actually mean something in our lives. Dostoyevsky said that if there were no god, man would have to create one, which is exactly what we have done. The concept of god can serve a purpose, but that purpose has as much potential for harm as for good, especially when one masquerades for the other. Believe what you want--just don't punish others for thinking differently and don't pretend to have a monopoly on truth. Civil society is an advance in human social organization. I fear--not with paranoia but with real alarm--that religion is as hostile to true civility today as it ever was, especially when it wraps itself in sincere piety.

20120104-13	16:23	SteveB	Re: Revolutionaries & Reactionaries (reply to Pam, above)
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I am sitting here completely blown away! First, I am so honored that you take the time and energy and care and love to write what you do for us. I treasure you as a friend.

For me, today is your most shining moment! First you find the paradigm of the "reactionary mind" which, with religiosity, explains so much of what we've been discussing for more than a year.

Then you concoct the most beautiful spiritual piece I have read in a long, long time.

I agree with every word, but with one humble addition. I have spoken before about the eleven dimensions and the multi-verse(s). Probably, Krauss is right and the universe came from what we think of as "nothing" but which would be, in reality, an unknown, possibly unknowable, scientific principle or principles. The known universe has exploded in our culture from a flat Earth with sun, moon, and stars (the spheres) revolving around it, to something so titanic as to be unfathomable. Maybe a God could concoct a green planet full of life, but the multi-verse(s)? This would not be an old man with a white beard sitting in a judge's chair. This would not be some friendly, alien mad scientist who just happened to create life on Earth and become a God. This would be some God indeed, to come out of "nothing" like He would have to have done. So He probably did not. Yet we did? It is wondrous, is it not? And he could be or represent the "spiritual" dimension of the universe, whatever that might be. He didn't necessarily have to create it all, did he? I mean, we probably made that part up, always trying to glorify him.

I too fear religion, for the reasons you express so well. As for my spirituality, I seem to have lost the God I once had, who was never the end-all-and-be-all of existence for me, as for the *tias*, below. But I admit to a vast tolerance for the belief in a God and I have to say that I just don't know. That is my one addition to your words.

I can be extremely tolerant of, but I cannot comprehend, people who live, breathe, and eat their faith. Not those who simply believe in God, but who are consumed by God, often without having undergone a true religious experience, whatever that might be.

My wife and I call the older women who go to the cathedral alone "*tias*" (tee' uhz)—aunts. They are the old maids of Bolivia and very religious. They come to mass once or twice every week and fervently say their prayers. They are god people with devout faith. They listen to what the priest tells them. Then they go out the giant doors and forget all about it, based on what you can see from the outside. They don't proselytize, they don't try to convert everyone they see, or talk about what good Christians they are and you, hint hint, aren't. They don't necessarily buy into major Church positions on abortion, birth control, gay marriage, or women priests. They don't think what they are told to think. They think practically about such things, meaning with a practicality. Christ's lessons are to be lived in one's lives and deeds, but spirituality resides within the heart. It is something between man and whatever God is, and does not require converting the world to one's views, or being married to Christ or Mohammed, and does not require a political agenda come hell or high water because God says so.

Being a practical person myself, I much prefer the *tias* to the American Evangelical types that seems so dominant within the Republican coalition. No offense to any who are.

Now, if we could just find a way to reason with Christians and Muslims before they destroy us to heaven, by heaven, and for heaven.

20120104-15	16:42	Art	Re: Revolutionaries & Reactionaries (reply to Pam, above)
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Well said Pam, as always. Religion is all about beliefs to explain the unexplainable. Handy when you convince people in the ME not to eat pork because God forbids it. Real reason was trichinosis but no one was capable of understanding it at the time, they just knew somehow it worked. Best to attribute it to God. As the Roman empire ran out of citizens for the army and the Christian religion - read Catholic church - aligned itself with the Roman empire, suddenly birth control became a no-no.

In history lots of people have exploited beliefs for their own gain, but the real problem becomes when the unexplainable is suddenly explainable. When that happens it causes a Whoops to those who have been telling us another reason. Copernicus comes to mind instantly for most of us. We see that today as the religious nuts try to deny evolution, global warming etc. I personally don't care that they do it but please stay out of the way of facts. For countries like Israel it is a real problem, as the growing number of Hasidic Jews don't serve in the IDF and depend on the secular ones to save their asses (learned that one from you Pam). In the Arabic world it has held back modernization for most of the Middle East. If they didn't have oil, we would simply watch them rot in ignorance - we pretty much do that for much of Africa now.

As for the American right, I agree with all those well written articles but in the end the right as we see it today is made up of people who really don't look forward very much and when they do, believe if we can just go back to the good ole days all will be well. Time marches on and you can never go back.

20120104-16	17:11	Marci	Re: Revolutionaries & Reactionaries (reply to SteveB & Pam, above)
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I loved your article and Pam's. How great to learn about scientific thoughts, theories, or discoveries about the universe and their guesses about god. I like the idea that god is not the creator of everything, especially of anything material. All that must come from nothing.

He is a Spirit like he told us. We just don't know what a spirit is. It is good to just get the good out of us from our own natural good. Like loving and protecting our children and respecting our neighbors.

Nevertheless, there are the other teachings like revenge is god's and payment too, love your enemy or forgive your brother 70 times 70, you know all the Christ teachings that were revolutionary. His teachings are not so normal standard human good behavior. They are more demanding. They want us to be better than we actually are. In the



old testament, people are normal, they get mad and want revenge. In Jesus' teachings people get humble and forgiving. I think there is the mystery of god wanting us to be better. I think maybe 80 percent of the gospels are not the truth about what Jesus actually said or did, but there must be about 20 percent that he actually did say. The Jesus part always puzzles me.

Well.... just adding some to your thoughts.

20120104-17 17:18 Pam Re: Revolutionaries & Reactionaries (reply to SteveB, above)

Your appreciation of my writing makes my day. I have decided in my old age to try to be more truthful. Sam Harris wrote a book called \*Lying\* that I really want to read. He says we should never lie, even a little bit. I just read an article that says we all lie, that it's part of our biological destiny. Babies fake cry to get attention; cancer cells "lie" to get around immune systems. I find both positions compelling, but having lived with substantial lies most of my life I'm going to give truthfulness a shot. I don't mean to be mysterious here. You already know some of my lies anyway. When it comes to religion, people pussyfoot around so much. We want to be tolerant and open-minded, so we hold ourselves back, at least I do/have. I don't want to shake my fist in people's faces, but I'm finding my silence becoming less consideration for others and more a convenience for myself. I'm testing this out with this newsletter. It's easier to tell the truth when you're not sitting in the same room with someone. Being completely honest with my family, my kids in particular, is more difficult, but I'm working on it.

As for you and your spiritual dimension, I can appreciate your leanings. At least I sort of can. At least we agree that there's simply a lot we don't know and may never know. Life has to be lived, ignorant or not. I just think religion, as an institution since the beginning of time, has done more to make human life intolerable than anything else. Flowers can grow on dunghills: a Bach cantata (written "for the glory of God") is sublime. *The Iliad* is a magnificent poem about war, and the movie *Ran* turns combat into a ballet. Good can take root in evil, but to my way of thinking, religion is the soil.

I treasure your friendship too.

20120104-19 17:43 SteveB Re: Revolutionaries & Reactionaries (reply to Pam, above)

Thank you! And thank you for your courage.

Billy Collins: "Consolation" is very pertinent to my situation. "The First Dream" is magnificent and sublime. My favorite, I think.

Billy is in Winter Park, Florida, happy not to have New York's weather, but still missing New York (though he's back and forth pretty often, if you ask me).

20120104-10 14:57 Dennis "How Banks Are Using Your Money to Create the Next Crash"

"How Banks Are Using Your Money to Create the Next Crash" by Keith Fitz-Gerald, Money Morning

Jan. 4, 2012, (<http://moneymorning.com/2012/01/04/how-banks-are-using-your-money-to-create-next-crash/>)

Now, this would be some good eatin'! Damn, I'd love to be able to get to this!

Savor Authentic Regional Eats



from Roadfood.com:

Have you made plans to attend the 4th Annual New Orleans Roadfood Festival March 23-25? If not, now is the time to put it on your calendar and make reservations. It is likely the city will soon be sold out that weekend. Flights from most places remain cheap, and rooms at the historic Monteleone Hotel on Royal Street still are available at the special Roadfood rate. Follow this link to book reservations: (<https://gc.synxis.com/rez.aspx?tps=fml&arrive=2012-3-21&adult=1&step=1&hotel=27003&shell=MSYHM&chain=10237&template=MSYHM&avcurrency=USD&group=RFF21C>)

New Location, New Vendors and Returning Favorites



Due to overwhelming attendance that outgrew the French Quarter last year, the festival is moving up to the French Market (est. 1791: America's oldest public market). There is shopping, dining, and entertainment all around, and the new location offers room for more Roadfood vendors as well as a stage with musical performances throughout the weekend.

Favorite foods from last year will be returning (Louie Mueller brisket, anyone?); and new dishes from near and far will be making this the most delicious concentration of regional eats ever! Details to be announced.

"The Splendid Table" Comes to Town: The Crawfish Boil Returns!



In addition to the Saturday and Sunday street festival, which remains free and open to all (pay for what you eat), two ticketed events promise special fun for attendees.

Friday Night: "Behind the Scenes with the Splendid Table." The festival kicks off in the Grand Ballroom of the Royal Sonesta Hotel, where Public Radio's award-winning weekly food show, "The Splendid Table," will be on stage live hosted by WWNO's Poppy Tooker with the show's star, Lynne Rossetto Kasper, Roadfood creators Jane & Michael Stern, and a host of notable chefs who are bringing their good food to the festival. A limited number of tickets will be available soon.

Saturday Night: Back by popular demand, a full-bore crawfish boil in the Cajun tradition. Don't forget: late March is the peak of Louisiana's crawfish season, when they are fattest and easiest to eat! A limited number of tickets will be available soon.

And of course Sunday morning, all are welcome to attend the beignet-eating contest when New Orleans' firefighters compete to see who can eat six beignets in the fastest time and take home the World Beignet Eating Champion Belt.

See you in New Orleans, March 23-25, 2012. Keep your eyes on Roadfood.com for further information about what there will be to eat and for ticket sales for the Friday night radio show and the Saturday night crawfish boil.

[20120104-14](#) 16:37 Ben Re: New Orleans Roadfood Festival (reply to SteveB, above)

Susette and I made it to the Key West Seafood Festival a year ago. Yum!



"Our Economy Has Failed—Until We Admit That, We're Screwed" by Kai Wright, ColorLines/AlterNet

Dec. 30, 2011, (<http://www.alternet.org/module/printversion/153614>)

At the foot of Manhattan's Broadway Ave., just below Wall Street, stands one of the city's most reliable tourism draws: Arturo Di Modica's 3.5-ton statue of a charging bull. Since 1989, the sculpture has been an iconic symbol of American wealth, of the aggressive capitalist spirit that, it is argued, made this country great and powerful. Visitors flock from around the world to rub the bull's horns for good luck. Or they used to, at least. Now, tourists snap pictures from behind police barricades.

For more than two months, the raging bull of wealth has sat caged, facing eye-to-eye with a New York Police Department cruiser as cops have worked around the clock to protect it from the Occupy Wall Street movement. The park's administrator has called the security "Orwellian." That's to say the least.

If you're looking for visuals to encapsulate 2011, look no further than the bizarre scene at Di Modica's bull. Daily, the country's largest police force mobilizes to protect the idea of American prosperity from an imagined threat, while the actual economy lays gored and gutted by demonstrable and ongoing crimes.

In the immediate, this perversity results from a spectacular failure of political leadership. We traveled a long, winding road to the point at which no-brainers like a modest payroll tax cut and an extension of unemployment benefits demand political brinksmanship. People of varying ideologies and partisan affiliations may debate endlessly who's more at fault, but to do so is to truly miss the forest for the trees. The ugly reality is no leader in either party has yet shown the mettle to rise and meet the enormity of today's challenges.

That's not to suggest moral equivalencies. Republican leaders have been openly obstructionist, preferring a broken economy to a successful Obama presidency. Their cynicism has rarely been as bald as the recent House vote on the payroll tax cut, but they've never made much effort to conceal it.

Still, even if President Obama had been given a willing Congress, the solutions he has championed aren't nearly on par with the problem. Like his congressional opponents, he insists the structural foundation of our economy remains strong. Rather than confront the core issues—inequity and instability—Obama has thrashed around with Republicans in the margins—over how to control debt, over the degree to which health care should be a commodity rather than a right, over which borrowers were the least irresponsible and thus deserving of help. Meanwhile, at each crucial juncture in his reform-branded presidency, Obama has left financial players to voluntarily take responsibility for their behavior. They remain steadfast in their refusal to do so.

These bipartisan leadership failures have prolonged the immediate crisis, which dates back to 2007, when the foreclosures that would bring down the system first began consuming working-class communities of color in particular. Four years later, Republicans and Democrats alike are still working off of the optimistic notion that we need only contain the immediate problem until we can get back to growth—that we need only protect the bull with barricades until those pesky protesters disappear and allow its charge to resume. With each year that our chosen leaders have indulged this fantasy, a cancer has spread. Each year has brought new records in the poverty, hunger and inequality that will ultimately consume this country.

But that's just the immediate crisis. As we move into an election year, in which U.S. residents will have prolonged debate over our collective priorities and values, we must pursue answers to a broader question. Since at least 1981, when the Reagan revolution overtook public policy, we have built an economy on two related fictions. The first is that boundless growth is sustainable. The second is that unrestrained capitalism, particularly in the financial sector, will create wealth for everyone. These are discredited ideas, and the question of 2012 must be how we begin building a society based on something different.

This broader question is crucial because, in truth, the problem extends past the economy. Look around and you'll find one broken institution after another, each of them buckling under the weight of the late 20th century consensus that greed is good, that a winner-takes-all individualism will somehow improve our collective endeavors. Industries, communities, natural resources, even sports leagues have collapsed as Ronald Reagan's corrosive vision has become dominant.

Meanwhile, racism and racial injustice remain rooted in our society in no small part because they are necessary to explain why unrestrained capitalism and unfettered growth fail so spectacularly in creating widespread wealth. The entrenched, generational poverty that has gripped so many black communities and the yawning racial gaps that persist in wealth and income, among other things, can only be explained if they are blamed on the individuals hurt by them. Thus "welfare queens" and "super predator" youth and cheating "illegals" and "lazy Indians" and on and on. These caricatures continue to inform public policy on poverty, education, immigration and more. They continue to explain away inequity and provide villains against which struggling whites can define themselves without questioning the larger system. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s quote about slave owners—the original unrestrained capitalists—still rings true: "The Southern aristocracy took the world and gave the poor white man Jim Crow."

Di Modica offered a quote on capitalism, too. In November, Newark's Star-Ledger asked the artist what he thought about the security around his statue. He didn't like it. "The bull is for the people," he declared. "The bull is for everyone, the people with money and the people with no money." If only it were so.

Wall Street's bull markets have proven to be for the benefit of a very few. But as the financial industry's largest players have been unleashed to pursue profit for themselves at all costs, the dreadful consequences have surely impacted everyone. Pensions have been wiped out. Family homes have been stripped of value, many taken away altogether. Small businesses have been locked out of credit markets. More than 14 million people are exiled from the labor force. A galling one in three black children and nearly as many Latino children are growing up in poverty right now, while the president brags about ferreting out fraud in the food stamp program rather than getting more money for it.

Our chosen political leaders have tolerated all of this in order to maintain the fiction that our economic system still works, that the organizing principles of our society remain valid. So the central question of 2012's likely all-consuming political debate must be simple: How do we acknowledge that our current economy is built on lies and then start erecting a new one based on equity and sustainability?

(Kai Wright is a freelance journalist in Ft. Greene, Brooklyn.)

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20120104-20

19:29

Art

Photo: Dog People (Who Also Go to Heaven)

Good one. We have to make up in numbers what we may lack in size. Of course there is that alert factor also.

[That "alert factor" looks really deadly, Art. ^\_^ How do they decide who gets the couch? Seniority? Size? FCFS? FIFO? -SteveB]



20120104-21

19:55

SteveG

"*Citizens United* Unleashed a Monster: Why the Real Winner in the Iowa Caucuses Is the Big-Money Super PAC"

"*Citizens United* Unleashed a Monster: Why the Real Winner in the Iowa Caucuses Is the Big-Money Super PAC" by Steven Rosenfeld, AlterNet

Jan. 4, 2012, (<http://www.alternet.org/story/153645/>)

The real winner of the 2012 Iowa Caucuses may not be any of the Republican candidates, but a new political animal that is ugly, loud, anti-democratic and coming to your state in the upcoming primaries and caucuses: the super PAC.

These creatures—unleashed by the U.S. Supreme Court's 2010 *Citizens United* ruling allowing direct corporate funding for "electioneering ads"—are satellite political campaigns that supposedly act independently of the candidates.

They can raise and spend unlimited amounts of money. They don't disclose donors until after the votes are counted. And they have been deluging Iowa with millions of dollars of harsh negative TV ads, from groups that are run by political consultants who have previously worked for the candidates.

On Tuesday morning, Newt Gingrich—who was targeted by nearly one-third of the more than \$14 million in super-PAC advertising spent in the weeks before the Iowa Caucus—went on CBS's "The Early Show" and called Romney "a liar" for claiming there was no link between his official campaign and a pro-Romney super PAC.



"Well, you seem shocked by it!" said Gingrich, when asked if he just called Romney a liar. "This is a man whose staff created the PAC. His millionaire friends fund the PAC. He pretends he has nothing to do with the PAC – it's baloney. He's not telling the American people the truth."

Gingrich has been the target of most super PAC ads in Iowa. These PACs are the bad cop half of the good cop-bad cop dance surrounding the presidential campaign. The candidates themselves tend to appear in TV ads saying mostly positive things and making slight swipes at Obama while their supposedly independent friends throw the political mud. And then the candidates hypocritically decry their mudslinging allies.

A super PAC supporting Ron Paul accused Gingrich of "serial hypocrisy." Another by a pro-Rick Perry group claimed he "got rich" through ties to Freddie Mac and also took a swipe at both Gingrich and Romney as political insiders. And that was just the beginning. There were more than 1,200 anti-Gingrich TV ads in the state before Christmas, according to the *Los Angeles Times*. In the week since, the pace has picked up. The super PACs poured vast sums into network television coffers while journalists reported that many Iowans felt their state's political process had been hijacked.

"Oh goodness," Jill Jepsen, 57, a retired department store employee told the *Los Angeles Times*. "I just don't listen to it. I can't listen to it. It makes me sick."

The super PACs are required to report their donors, but as the *Sacramento Bee* pointed out in a Tuesday editorial, their lawyers have been busy filing papers to push back the deadline for doing so until after the presidential primaries or caucuses in early states. Such intentional secrecy means the handful of big money donors behind these groups—there were 264 registered PACs as of last week, with assets of \$32 million—will not be accountable to anyone other than their candidate of choice.

To date, the registered super PACs have only spent about half of the money raised thus far, according to the Washington-based Center for Responsive Politics. In other words, they will be playing big roles in the mostly small upcoming primary states.

The question of who benefits from this style of political campaigning has been raised on newspaper editorial pages, where super PACs have been called "slush funds" that distort the democratic process. But there is little prospect they will be slowed or stopped in 2012. Progressive law groups such as Democracy 21 have gone before the Federal Election Commission to seek better, real-time disclosure. However, the FEC is one of the most gridlocked bodies in Washington, a condition that seems to serve the interests of both political parties.

The bottom line is that in *Citizens United*, the U.S. Supreme Court majority believed there should be no restraints on what has been called the "marketplace of political ideas." In short, more political speech, political advertising and messaging—no matter the source or sponsor—should be permitted. The Court also took the view that modern corporations play a valuable role in American life and thus deserve constitutional free speech rights.

In many respects, the super PACs are a perfect representation of "the face of American capitalism," Kendall Thomas of Columbia Law School told a panel convened by the Brennan Center for Justice shortly after the *Citizens United* ruling in January 2010. The decision would unleash outsized and unaccountable players into the American political arena, he predicted, just as globalization has ushered large corporate players into the international economic order. "We need to contest the vision of politics, and the vision of politics embraced in *Citizens United*, which views citizenship and constitutional democracy as part of the world of commodities," he concluded.

And so in the very states that vie for national attention in the start of the nominating process—Iowa, New Hampshire, South Carolina, Florida, Nevada—voters are likely to find themselves overwhelmed by negative messaging from the latest big-money political behemoth. Few people watching the super PAC ads in Iowa would suggest they are legitimate proxies for ordinary citizens in a struggling economy. If anything, this messaging may be a factor behind the 41 percent of Republicans in the state that pollsters said were undecided just before the Caucuses.

Indeed, the losers in the Iowa Caucuses are not just the Republicans with the fewest supporters. They are that state's voters—and voters in the primary and caucus states to follow—who will experience a political process increasingly distant from their lives.

(Steven Rosenfeld covers democracy issues for AlterNet and is the author of *Count My Vote: A Citizen's Guide to Voting* (AlterNet Books, 2008).)

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<a href="#">20120104-22</a> 22:53 SteveG Fw: Alan Grayson: Rick Santorum Is Wrong
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from Alan Grayson:

Maybe I should leave it alone. Maybe I should just let Rick Santorum enjoy the 15 minutes of fame that comes with getting 30,000 Republicans to vote for you. (Less than one-hundredth of one percent of the U.S. population, by the way.)

But there is something that Rick Santorum said last month that really bothers me. And I'm going to tell you what it is.

On December 5, Santorum was talking to a group of about 100 students at Dordt College, a small Christian college in Iowa. A student referred to a 2009 Harvard study showing that 44,000 Americans die each year because they don't have health coverage. The student then asked Santorum what that meant for the Christian responsibility of caring for the poor. Specifically, the student questioned whether "God appreciates the fact" that all those Americans die each year for lack of healthcare.

Santorum's response?) Rick Santorum "rejects" the idea "that people die in America because of lack of health insurance." (<http://grayson.salsalabs.com/dia/track.jsp?v=2&c=kw8wI4hWiz7HCpmiMilPFUICRun1uToi>)

Wake up, Rick.

The student was referring to the same study that I publicized on the Floor of the House two weeks after it was published in the American Journal of Public Health. Here it is (below). It documents that 44,789 Americans die each year because they have no health insurance. In fact, if you take two Americans who are physically identical – same age, same gender, same race, same weight, same smoking history – and one of them has health insurance and one does not, then the one without health insurance is 40% more likely to die each year. (<http://grayson.salsalabs.com/dia/track.jsp?v=2&c=SfiltvB1pFrY0zuRIHN%2F5EICRun1uToi>)

Here is a link to my speech on this, entitled "I Apologize to the Dead and Their Families." (<http://grayson.salsalabs.com/dia/track.jsp?v=2&c=gAUK2%2B8GTgxdKHC8FT2Da58YdQxyCzZa>)

I remember the same response from right-wingers then as we hear from Santorum today – anyone can go to an emergency room. I ask them to show me an emergency room that will provide chemotherapy to a cancer victim. There isn't one.

But to answer that challenge, I started a website called <http://www.NamesOfTheDead.com>. I invited surviving family and friends to tell me about people whom they had loved and lost, because they had no health coverage. And they did – thousands of them. I read some of their stories on the House Floor. (<http://grayson.salsalabs.com/dia/track.jsp?v=2&c=t22BZw3EwFAPDrrrh5FjuEICRun1uToi>)

Then I gave a speech identifying how many people died each year for lack of health care in each district represented by a Republican healthcare opponent. The Republicans interrupted that speech for two hours, until the House Parliamentarian told them that they had to let me continue. A reporter who has covered Capitol Hill for more than 25 years told me that that kind of interruption had never happened before. (<http://grayson.salsalabs.com/dia/track.jsp?v=2&c=IrVaxYA91%2F5YdrGaCIIdTklICRun1uToi>)

But Rick Santorum apparently never got the memo. He thinks that no one in America ever dies because he has no health care.

Why does Santorum think that? Because he has to. He has to engage in flat denial of the reality that 50 million Americans – one out of every six of us – face each day. Because to face that reality would mean that Santorum would have to face the brutality, the swinishness, the cruelty and the savagery of the policies that he so enthusiastically espouses.

For God's sake – every single other industrialized country in the entire world has universal health care. Why can't we? How many more people have to die? How many more sacrifices on the altar of Almighty Greed?

Any health care system that denies necessary care on the basis of wealth is evil. It doesn't matter how you micromanage it, or tinker with it. It's evil.

When Justice Harry Blackmun began voting against death in every death penalty case, he gave this simple and eloquent explanation: "From this day forward, I no longer shall tinker with the machinery of death."

We need to reach the same kind of realization in health care. Forget about the tinkering. This is America, not Myanmar. People who are sick need to be able to see a doctor. Because we are human beings, not cattle. End of story.

Are you listening, Rick Santorum?

Courage, Alan Grayson

P.S. To the tens of thousands of us who helped our campaign during 2011, thank you. From my heart, thank you. (<http://grayson.salsalabs.com/dia/track.jsp?v=2&c=eBbgfmYTECOng67%2FMLKpg0ICRun1uToi>)

<http://grayson.salsalabs.com/dia/track.jsp?v=2&c=aCepfV2D%2BHMstLYcerakw%2Fnelx37cf0s>

(Paid for and Authorized by the Committee to Elect Alan Grayson, 8419 Oak Park Road, Orlando, FL 32819)

[20120104-24](#)

23:15

Bill

Re: Alan Grayson: Rick Santorum Is Wrong (reply to SteveG, above) & "Santorum Surge Brings Ethics Questions"

Check out the MSN story, courtesy of ABC, story on ethics problems that Santorum appears to have. He needs to go to a monastery.

"Santorum Surge Brings Ethics Questions" by Matthew Mosk and Brian Ross, ABC News

Jan. 4, 2012, (<http://abcnews.go.com/m/story?id=15287424&sid=3029941>)

Rick Santorum's powerful finish in the Iowa caucus is bringing fresh attention to his tenure in Congress, including ethics questions that dogged him about a preferred mortgage he received from a bank run by campaign donors, and federal funds that went to a real estate developer who backed his charity.

One of the top donors to Santorum's charity was also the beneficiary of an \$8 million Santorum-sponsored federal earmark, according to published reports. Melanie Sloan, a former federal prosecutor who filed an ethics complaint against Santorum in 2006 on behalf of a watchdog group, said her organization's website received a tidal wave of visitors in the past 24 hours, and in an interview she said she believes people will discover that the GOP presidential contender is "hardly the moral paragon he purports to be."

"There were several instances in which Santorum appeared to have taken campaign contributions in direct exchange for legislative assistance," said Sloan, whose organization, Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington (CREW), spent months investigating Santorum's activities while he was in office. "He violated Senate gift rules by accepting a mortgage from a bank in which he had no interest and which otherwise made loans only to its own investors."

Santorum has rarely responded to such attacks, but at one point he wrote a letter to a Philadelphia newspaper criticizing the ethics complaints as a series of "disingenuous innuendo and half-truths." The Senate Committee on Ethics never responded to CREW's complaint, and the two-term senator left Congress in 2007 after losing a reelection bid. A Santorum campaign spokesman has not yet responded to phone messages and email requests for comment.

For months, Santorum's record and background have escaped presidential-caliber scrutiny from rivals and reporters because he never appeared to have traction with voters in the early Republican contests. But as Santorum's GOP rivals have learned, the national spotlight can be searing. Questions about Newt Gingrich's consulting work for Fannie Mae surfaced in attack ads against him. Herman Cain bowed out of the race after reports of sexual harassment complaints dogged him for weeks. If the pattern holds true as the winnowed GOP field heads from Iowa down the rural roads of New Hampshire, Santorum will be the latest to undergo intensified scrutiny from rival campaigns and from the national media.

Perhaps the most jarring detail from his tenure in office is the unorthodox \$500,000 mortgage that Santorum and his wife secured on the home in rural Virginia they had purchased for \$643,361. According to a series of reports in the Philadelphia Daily News, the mortgage came from Philadelphia Trust Company, a fledgling private bank catering to "affluent investors and institutions" whose officers had contributed \$24,000 to Santorum's political action committees and re-election campaign.

In advertising, the lender said it only offered its preferred rates to well-heeled borrowers who also used their investment services. But Santorum's public disclosure forms showed he did not have the required minimum \$250,000 in liquid assets and was not an investor with Philadelphia Trust. His ability to secure the five-year loan led Sloan to file a complaint under a Senate ethics rule that specifically prohibits members from accepting a loan on terms not available to members of the general public. At the time, a Santorum spokeswoman told the Daily News that the mortgage terms were set at "market rates," but did not provide further comment.

After leaving Congress in 2007, Santorum sold the house for \$850,000.

The other issue that captivated Santorum critics involved a non-profit charity called Operation Good Neighbor. Santorum founded the organization to "illustrate compassionate conservatism" but did not take a formal role in its day-to-day operations. The charity was run by his campaign staffers. It operated out of the same building as his campaign headquarters. And its board included several top Washington, D.C. lobbyists who had clients with millions of dollars in business before the U.S. Senate, according to a 2006 report by WTAE, the ABC News affiliate in Pittsburgh.

The chairman of Operation Good Neighbor was Michael O'Neill, CEO of Preferred Real Estate. The company was involved in a waterfront development in Chester, Pa., that, with Santorum's help, benefitted from more than \$8 million in federal grants, according to local reports.

O'Neill told ABC News that accusations suggesting the charity work and his development were connected were "crazy."

"My answer is absolutely not," said O'Neill, who is now out of the real estate business. "I was never told, 'If you do this, we'll help with that.' They were completely unrelated."

O'Neill said Santorum was a figurehead with the charity and that the senator derived no benefit from the work the charity performed -- doling out contributions to small groups around the state. "He was proud of the work of the charity," O'Neill said. "Rick helped bring exposure, but other than that, he didn't get anything out of it."

20120104-25

23:41

SteveB

Re: Alan Grayson: Rick Santorum Is Wrong (reply to SteveG & Bill, above)

Have you googled "Santorum"? Gross, but hilarious! I guess he can't let his many kids google their own father.

20120104-23

22:57

SteveG

"Church in Nigeria Donates to the U.S."

How far have we fallen as a country?

"Church in Nigeria Donates to the U.S." KNDU/MSNBC

Jan. 4, 2012, ([http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/45879624/ns/local\\_news-tri\\_cities\\_wa/t/church-nigeria-donates-us/#.TwV\\_WtRSQhI](http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/45879624/ns/local_news-tri_cities_wa/t/church-nigeria-donates-us/#.TwV_WtRSQhI))

(KENNEWICK, Wash.) We often hear about local charity groups sending donations to less fortunate communities around the world, but for one local group the roles are reversed.

The Family Research Center for Children of Special Needs in Kennewick received a \$3,000 donation from the Synagogue Church of all Nations in Nigeria. The money will benefit those in need in the Tri-Cities.

"The name itself is pretty self-explanatory—it's called Synagogue Church of all Nations, so he doesn't just believe to give to his own nation but to all around the world, and that even includes the United States of America," says Mariana Parkhotyuk, Good News Church.

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—Friends of the Middle,  
Steven W. Baker (SteveB), Editor/Moderator

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