



## FRIENDS OF THE MIDDLE NEWSLETTER #72 — FEB. 13, 2012

*Welcome to always lively political discussion and whatever else comes up.*  
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### **They Want Slaves Not Consumers!**

(posted by Steven W. Baker / SteveB, Feb. 13, 2012)

Will America be brought down like Greece?



The takeaway continues long after workers have suffered enough abuse. Republicans can try as hard as they want to destroy the unions, the minimum wage, overtime, and safe working conditions, but they will not succeed. This is the last gasp of a bankrupt political idea whose time has come to be burned. Notice one very important fact about the Republicans: For everything they take from the lower and middle classes always ends up in the hands of their rich buddies. Weird, huh? And the nation permits them to do it. Amazing!

"House Transportation Bill 'Technical Correction' Would Strip Workers of Pay Protections" by Dave Jamieson, Politico

Feb. 12, 2012, ([http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/02/12/house-transportation-bill-rail-drivers\\_n\\_1271644.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/02/12/house-transportation-bill-rail-drivers_n_1271644.html))

(WASHINGTON) **A little-noted provision in the House Republicans' controversial energy and transportation bill would strip several thousand workers within the rail-industry of their federal minimum-wage and overtime protections, potentially making low-wage jobs pay even less.**

Listed in the bill under the heading "Technical Correction," provision 6602 would exempt several companies who transport rail workers from their obligations under the Fair Labor Standards Act, the 1938 law that guarantees basic

worker rights. The carveout would allow a handful of boutique contractors to pay no overtime to their drivers who haul rail workers between worksites, often driving long distances of 300 miles or more.

"It's outrageous that House Republicans are trying to take away overtime protections for a class of workers at the behest of a special interest," Rep. George Miller (D-Calif.) said of the provision in a statement to HuffPost. "These workers deserve the right to overtime pay. It's not only a matter of fairness, but also a matter of public safety."

Earnings for rail-crew drivers often work out to little more than minimum wage, and many drivers must remain on-call for long stretches. Miller and others worry that by depressing wages further, the quality of the work -- and, hence, roadway safety -- could decline. Miller is expected to offer an amendment to the bill this week that would maintain the labor protections for rail drivers.

The House's transportation committee, which is chaired by Rep. John Mica (R-Fla.) and approved the bill, did not return a request for comment from The Huffington Post. Officials at several of the companies that could potentially benefit from the change -- including Professional Transportation, Inc., RailCrew Express and Coach America -- also did not respond to requests for comment.

Jim Stem, legislative director at the United Transportation Union, said he just recently became aware of the provision's implications, given that the bill would merely tweak a few words in existing law. He called the provision a giveaway to contractors in the rail industry. According to Stem, many of the rail drivers already earn low wages and work long hours; the loss of overtime, he said, would have an immediate effect on their paychecks.

"It amuses me when [House Speaker] John Boehner says there are no earmarks in there," Stem said of the bill. "This is an earmark for a handful of wealthy people who own these companies. This is a windfall."

It isn't merely Democrats who are angered by the transportation plan put forth by House Republicans. Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood, who was a Republican congressman before taking the helm at the department, last week declared it "the worst transportation bill I've ever seen during 35 years of public service," saying it "hollows out" the department's top priority of safety and "guts" the administration's transportation efforts of the last three years.

"This is the most partisan transportation bill that I have ever seen," LaHood told Politico.

The \$260 billion, five-year bill calls for more highways and toll roads to be paid for with offshore drilling. In addition to cutting funding for bike and pedestrian projects, the bill would slash subsidies for Amtrak by 25 percent; privatize food and drink vending on Amtrak trains while guaranteeing such sales with taxpayer money; and substantially increase the size of trucks allowed on roadways, a potential boon for the trucking industry but a change that's opposed by environmental groups.

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<a href="#">20120210-01</a>	08:33	Dick	"The Economics of Abbott and Costello"
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Barack Obama spent considerable time during the State of the Union address on jobs and the economy – both of which are in a sorry state.

As a result of the smoke-and-mirrors Obama-spin, the following little dialog provides a good review of real unemployment. Credit is due to Barry Levinson, the famed Academy Award winning director, screenwriter, and producer who created and first published this a couple of months ago in the Huffington Post. Enjoy!

"The Economics of Abbott and Costello" by Barry Levinson, Huffington Post

Nov. 28, 2011, ([http://www.huffingtonpost.com/barry-levinson/the-economics-of-abbott-and-costello\\_b\\_1115502.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/barry-levinson/the-economics-of-abbott-and-costello_b_1115502.html))

Unemployment as reported is at 9 percent. But it's actually more than 16 percent. Some smart statistician came up with a distinction. A slight of hand to make the unemployment number tolerable rather than frightening. The concept was simple: 9 percent are unemployed and are actively looking for work. The 16 percent includes those

who gave up and are no longer actively looking for work. So those casualties are no longer counted. They cease to exist. The 9 percent is a fake. A sham. And worthy of an Abbott & Costello routine. If that great comedy team were still alive, the routine on our unemployment woes might go something like this:

COSTELLO: I want to talk about the unemployment rate in America.

ABBOTT: Good Subject. Terrible Times. It's 9%.

COSTELLO: That many people are out of work?

ABBOTT: No, that's 16%.

COSTELLO: You just said 9%.

ABBOTT: 9% Unemployed.

COSTELLO: Right 9% out of work.

ABBOTT: No, that's 16%.

COSTELLO: Okay, so it's 16% unemployed.

ABBOTT: No, that's 9%...

COSTELLO: WAIT A MINUTE. Is it 9% or 16%?

ABBOTT: 9% are unemployed. 16% are out of work.

COSTELLO: IF you are out of work you are unemployed.

ABBOTT: No, you can't count the "Out of Work" as the unemployed. You have to look for work to be unemployed.

COSTELLO: BUT THEY ARE OUT OF WORK!!!

ABBOTT: No, you miss my point.

COSTELLO: What point?

ABBOTT: Someone who doesn't look for work, can't be counted with those who look for work. It wouldn't be fair.

COSTELLO: To who?

ABBOTT: The unemployed.

COSTELLO: But they are ALL out of work.

ABBOTT: No, the unemployed are actively looking for work... Those who are out of work stopped looking. They gave up. And, if you give up, you are no longer in the ranks of the unemployed.

COSTELLO: So if you're off the unemployment rolls, that would count as less unemployment?

ABBOTT: Unemployment would go down. Absolutely!

COSTELLO: The unemployment just goes down because you don't look for work?

ABBOTT: Absolutely it goes down. That's how you get to 9%. Otherwise it would be 16%. You don't want to read about 16% unemployment do ya?

COSTELLO: That would be frightening.

ABBOTT: Absolutely.

COSTELLO: Wait, I got a question for you. That means they're two ways to bring down the unemployment number?

ABBOTT: Two ways is correct.

COSTELLO: Unemployment can go down if someone gets a job?

ABBOTT: Correct.

COSTELLO: And unemployment can also go down if you stop looking for a job?

ABBOTT: Bingo.

COSTELLO: So there are two ways to bring unemployment down, and the easier of the two is to just stop looking for work.

ABBOTT: Now you're thinking like an economist.

COSTELLO: I don't even know what the hell I just said!

Abbott and Costello did a comedy routine about fictitious ball players called "Who's On First?" The absurdist number of the real unemployed is not a joke.

<a href="#">20120210-02</a>	08:48	Pam	Re: "Contraception Controversy Consumes D.C., Campaign[s]" (reply to SteveG, FotM Newsletter #71)
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Well said, SteveG for the truth and Pam for incisive brevity!

<a href="#">20120210-04</a>	10:50	Art	Re: "Contraception Controversy Consumes D.C., Campaign[s]" (reply to SteveG, FotM Newsletter #71 & Pam, above)
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Well said, Steve for the truth and Pam for incisive brevity!

<a href="#">20120210-03</a>	10:00	Pam	Re: Federal Birth Control Mandate (reply to Carol, FotM Newsletter #71)
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Catholic taxes for contraception--a violation of religious liberty or the price of living in a democracy? Many of us would prefer our taxes not be used to prosecute wars or subsidize corn farmers or prop up dictators, but we pay them. Why should being a Catholic carry more weight than being a Quaker? The whole contraception brou-ha-ha is more politics as usual, which is to say, ridiculous.

<a href="#">20120210-08</a>	14:25	Dennis	Re: Federal Birth Control Mandate (reply to Carol, FotM Newsletter #71)
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Why is this not religion dictating public policy? What gives Catholic bishops the authority to discriminate against employees of a hospital serving the general public? Is this not the religious tyranny that the separation of church and state is intended to prevent?

The above nonsense about Jews, Muslims, and pork dictates is just a red herring. Christians and Catholics can believe any narrow minded thing they want in their churches, but when they provide commercial services to the public, they can't determine what services to provide according to their own religious biases. I suppose you might believe it was a government power grab to require a member of the KKK who owned a restaurant to refuse service to blacks a couple of generations ago. That was the slippery slope argument then.

20120211-01 00:23 Carol Re: Federal Birth Control Mandate (reply to Dennis, above)

This isn't public policy. These are not government-run hospitals, they are faith-based charities, hospitals and schools. Any of their employees are welcome to get different jobs that have more inclusive health insurance that suits their personal desires. This is not discrimination against employees. They won't pay for their cigarettes either; have a problem with that? I would go to jail before paying for someone else's morning-after pill. It completely violates my conscience, and it is absolutely ridiculous to assign me to the same category as the KKK (talk about red herring & nonsense!). Racism is evil, and so is abortion. I am completely against both.

You have the tyranny exactly backwards. The "separation of church and state" phrase comes from a personal & private letter between President Thomas Jefferson and the Baptist Association of Danbury, Connecticut, shortly after he became president. Mr. Jefferson wrote the letter in the context of not allowing the government's restriction or interference in religious practices. He and the Founders believed and wrote extensively that the First Amendment was written to prevent the federal establishment of a national denomination and to keep them from trying to regulate or restrict religious expression (which unfortunately is what is going on now).

Found some quotes of his:

[N]o power over the freedom of religion...[is] delegated to the United States by the Constitution. —Kentucky Resolution, 1798

In matters of religion, I have considered that its free exercise is placed by the Constitution independent of the powers of the general [federal] government. —Second Inaugural Address, 1805

[O]ur excellent Constitution...has not placed our religious rights under the power of any public functionary. —Letter to the Methodist Episcopal Church, 1808

I consider the government of the United States as interdicted [prohibited] by the Constitution from intermeddling with religious institutions...or exercises. —Letter to Samuel Millar, 1808

I looked up Jefferson's letter too: Clearly, his intention in this letter is to keep governmental tyranny out of religion and religious expression and not the other way around. Before you quote personal and private letters, you should read the entire letter to ensure you're correctly understanding the context.

Gentlemen,

The affectionate sentiments of esteem and approbation which you are so good as to express towards me on behalf of the Danbury Baptist Association give me the highest satisfaction. . . . Believing with you that religion is a matter which lies solely between man and his God; that he owes account to none other for his faith or his worship; that the legislative powers of government reach actions only and not opinions, I contemplate with sovereign reverence that act of the whole American people which declared that their legislature should "make no law respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof," thus building a wall of separation between Church and State. Adhering to this expression of the supreme will of the nation in behalf of the rights of conscience, I shall see with sincere satisfaction the progress of those sentiments which tend to restore to man all his natural rights, convinced he has no

natural right in opposition to his social duties. I reciprocate your kind prayers for the protection and blessing of the common Father and Creator of man, and tender you for yourselves and your religious association assurances of my high respect and esteem.

During the 1789 debates of the ninety Founding Fathers who framed the First Amendment, not once was the phrase "separation of church and state" mentioned. Today this phrase is regularly used pretty much the opposite of what it originally meant.

—Thomas Jefferson

As for this new "concession" the Obama administration issued today, it is just more politics. So now religious employers won't have to pay for abortion pills, sterilization and contraception, but their insurance companies will. Hmmm. Who pays for the insurance policy? The cost will still be theirs, because of course, the insurance companies will simply raise their premiums.

If you want your birth control paid for, just don't get a job at a Catholic hospital. People switch jobs to get greater benefits all the time.

[20120211-02](#) 14:55 Dennis Re: Federal Birth Control Mandate (reply to Carol, above)

**From Dennis (Feb. 11, 2012, 2:55 pm)—reply to Carol, above, ref: Federal Birth Control Mandate**

Wrong. The insurance companies will absorb the cost of contraception gladly. It is cheaper for them than paying for unintended pregnancies and deliveries.

[20120211-03](#) 15:02 Carol Re: Federal Birth Control Mandate (reply to Dennis, above)

**From Carol (Feb. 11, 2012, 3:02 pm)—reply to Dennis, above, ref: Federal Birth Control Mandate**

Doubt it. Insurance companies see their overhead go up, and they raise rates. They don't sit there and calculate how much they're "saving" by not paying for deliveries. No businesses absorb increased costs "gladly."

[20120211-04](#) 15:05 Dennis Re: Federal Birth Control Mandate (reply to Carol, above)

**From Dennis (Feb. 11, 2012, 3:05 pm)—reply to Carol, above, ref: Federal Birth Control Mandate**

If you don't think insurance companies calculate every last penny of costs, then you must be some kind of naive libertarian.

[20120210-07](#) 11:53 Beth Re: Freedom of Information and So Much More (reply to Pam, FotM Newsletter #71)

First of all, Pam, thank you for your story. When I became pregnant in 1966 my father wanted me to go to Washington D.C. to live with my aunt and then give up the baby when it was born. I refused. It was the first time I ever stood up to him. As a result I have a handsome son who is the image of his father and three beautiful grandchildren.

As for the noise the Catholic Church is making, I recommend the article on the front page of the *New York Times* today. This issue has nothing to do with birth control and nothing to do with religious freedom. It is all about power and politics. The vast majority of practicing Catholics do not agree with the church's position on birth control, and do not follow it.

I also recommend David Brook's column today on Mitt Romney.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2012/02/10/us/bishops-planned-battle-on-birth-control-coverage-rule.html?pagewanted=all>

<http://www.nytimes.com/2012/02/11/nyregion/catholic-institutions-reluctantly-comply-with-ny-contraceptives-law.html>

<http://www.nytimes.com/2012/02/10/opinion/brooks-the-crowd-pleaser.html>

20120210-10 16:48 Pam Re: Freedom of Information and So Much More (reply to Beth, above)

Thanks, Beth. You did the right thing, but then you did marry John. My beau went back to England and no marriage was forthcoming. I still wish I had stood my ground. I feel about the injustice of that time vis a vis girls like us the way I do about racial segregation. It was just wrong.

I'll check out those articles.

20120210-05 10:55 SteveG "White Nationalists Share Spotlight with GOP at CPAC"

"White Nationalists Share Spotlight with GOP at CPAC" by Joe Conason, *The National Memo*

Feb. 10, 2012, (<http://www.nationalmemo.com/article/white-nationalists-share-stage-gop-cpac>)

If the Conservative Political Action Conference can be expected to accomplish anything more than angry bellowing, it is to reliably embarrass every decent and sane conservative in America. Sometimes the problem is a conspiratorial extremist co-sponsor, like the John Birch Society; sometimes the problem is a certifiable kook giving the keynote address, like Glenn Beck; and sometimes the problem is just vicious bullying of gay conservatives, who have been officially expelled from the conference.

But now the annual Washington showcase of the far right is plunging toward new depths of disgrace, by featuring "white nationalists" among its speakers.

To explain the perils of multiculturalism and (nonwhite) immigration, the CPAC organizers have invited several avowed white nationalists -- who will spew their bigotry in the same conference hall that will host speeches by Republican presidential candidates Mitt Romney, Rick Santorum, Newt Gingrich, and Ron Paul (and has already been visited by Herman Cain, who complained about the damage being done to the nation by "stupid" people).

According to reports by People For the American Way and the Institute for Research and Education on Human Rights (IREHR), the CPAC contingent this week will include Peter Brimelow, the notorious race-baiting activist who founded VDARE.com, an anti-immigration website that has long been described by the Southern Poverty Law Center as a hate site. Brimelow's website regularly publishes the work of white supremacist and anti-Semitic writers.

Joining Brimelow on at least one panel will be Robert Vandervoort, identified by CPAC as executive director of ProEnglish, a group advocating "English-only" policies -- but Vandervoort is also the former organizer of the "Chicagoland Friends of American Renaissance," another white nationalist hate group that is affiliated with the same racist authors who appear on Brimelow's website. Their panel is called "The Failure of Multiculturalism: How the Pursuit of Diversity Is Weakening the American Identity."

Actually, Vandervoort was slated to appear on two panels at CPAC, including one titled "High Fences, Wide Gates: States vs. the Feds, the Rule of Law & American Identity" where he will be joined by Republican politician Kris Kobach, the Kansas Secretary of State. As IREHR recently reported, Vandervoort "was at the center of white nationalist activity during his time in Illinois." His "Chicagoland" outfit often held joint activities with the local chapter of the Council of Conservative Citizens, the group that directly succeeded the White Citizens Councils of the

anti-civil rights era in the South and Midwest. In their own nod to diversity, Vandervoort and Kobach's panel will also include two Latino Republican legislators from Florida, Rep. David Rivera and Rep. Mario Diaz-Balart.

Questioned about the invitations extended to such unsavory figures as Brimelow and Vandervoort, a CPAC spokeswoman told BuzzFeed that the American Conservative Union, which operates CPAC with a coalition of other right-wing groups, accepts no responsibility for their presence. "CPAC is proud to have more than 150 sponsors and exhibitors this year," boasted Kristy Campbell, the CPAC flack, in an email. "This panel was not organized by the ACU, and specific questions on the event, content or speakers should be directed to the sponsoring organization. Cosponsors and affiliated events do not necessarily represent the opinions of the American Conservative Union."

But CPAC did decide to bar participation by the gay conservative groups such as the Log Cabin Republicans, and to remove the tainted John Birch Society as a co-sponsor. The gays bother them and the conspiracy nuts humiliate them, but evidently they feel no imperative to shun the white supremacists.

<a href="#">20120210-06</a>	11:26	Art	The Theory of Hippos
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This is a little off our usual subjects but the pictures of Hippos made me think of one of my many wacko historical development theories. (No all wacko theories don't necessarily reside on the hands of tea baggers).

As a somewhat haphazard student of history I always seemed attracted to the to me little nagging questions that sometimes arose as I studied. Although often not productive, that little trait did win me an award in college for the best senior essay - of course it was The Citadel, so maybe competition wasn't all that tough.

At any rate, one of the little things that always nagged at me was, why Africa south of the Sahara never really developed any notable civilization. Oh, I know you can argue a few things but in truth they did not. I think the Hippos had a lot to do with it. Hippos are very territorial and very aggressive. You do not just canoe through their river sites. If you figure early civilizations needed trade to develop, and the shipment of goods normally follows rivers where it can be easily shipped, not so in sub Saharan Africa because of the Hippos. Early civilizations would have used dugouts or other small boats all of which can be and are easily swamped by the Hippos. Hence no trade along rivers and no early development of civilization. Just a thought.

FYI I have chosen not to try to share my theories with Mr. Jared Diamond figuring he has enough to think about. However I am considering the topic, 'The effect of the Turnip upon the Industrial Revolution' for my PhD dissertation.

<a href="#">20120210-09</a>	15:30	FotM	Re: The Theory of Hippos (FotM group discussion)
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**SteveG:** A reasonable theory, much more reasonable than any Tea Bagger.

**Pam:** Art, you should write a monograph: *The Hippo and the Failure of Civilization*. They could make it into a movie. :-) I think you're onto something, though. Your theory makes as much sense as anything. Maybe all it takes is one little variable to send evolution (even social evolution) in a different direction.

I also agree that the turnip had a pivotal role in the Industrial Revolution--see Thomas Hardy's *\*Jude the Obscure\**. Or maybe it's *\*Tess of the d'Urbervilles\**. In one of them there is a very dramatic scene of a field of grain being harvested by a huge mechanical combine, or whatever it is they use for such purposes. The tines of the machine gather up the grain and feed it into a hopper where it is ground into wheat and chaff, so far so good. But along with the grain dozens of baby rabbits get scooped up and macerated too. It's a chilling example of nature vs. industry. D. H. Lawrence had a few things to say about that as well. History is so fascinating because, for one thing, it's never black and white. More grain means more bread means more people get fed, but it also means the gruesome deaths of innocent creatures. We are all complicit.

**SteveB:** Art's on the right track. My ex-wife's grandfather used to go on safaris. He always said the hippos were much more dangerous than lions. Even in North America nobody went very far except via river in Indian times.

Lewis and Clark always had bigger problems when they couldn't be on a river. You can still hardly get around Amazonia except by river. Much of Africa must have been similar and infested by those nasty fat boys. It could have a big effect on civilization. Plus they didn't have good internet or cell phone service, so it was tough to get civilization going real well.

About the bunnies in the fields...I doubt if Snopes.com says anything, but it's highly unlikely. Almost all bunny children are born in the spring or soon after. Harvesting is in the fall, when it's unlikely baby bunnies are around. The adults run. Snakes and mice would be a worse problem, but most equipment doesn't go that low, so small animals can run away or duck. I've spent some time in fields and noticed very little to no problem with bloody little corpses in the grain. Also, grain doesn't get ground into flour at picking time, it's just separated from the chaff, not even the hulls, normally. Corn, of course, is shucked in the field as it is picked.

**Pam:** Hummmmm. My memory might be hazy, but I distinctly remember bunnies in the harvester. I always thought Hardy was great on country matters (no pun intended), but maybe he got this wrong. Or maybe I did. Of course, you're right, the timing is off.

**Phil:** I remember when SteveG and I were rafting down the Big Walnut; dodging gators, hippos, piranha... I won't boar you, it's ancient history.

**Pam:** Oh, I can picture it all!

**SteveG:** Ahhhh, back in the day.

**Phil:** In an effort to follow the animal theme, I chose boar rather than bore. I was disappointed someone didn't hassle me about it. Especially you, SteveB.

**Pam:** I caught it, but I didn't want to embarrass you. ;-)

**Phil:** Being the lady that you are. Thanks.

**Clark:** I was going to compliment you on the pun, but I wasn't sure it was intentional. :) Anyway, the Big Walnut riff was the best laugh of the day,

**SteveB:** I plead temporary insanity, Phil. I read it, but it was late last night after coming home from a pre-Carnaval/birthday party. I didn't know if I was reading English or Spanish. I'm better today, just a bit of a headache...I do like the pun, though. Hope everyone is having a great weekend! Take care.

**Bill:** Phil, better to be a boar than a bore. I know some Boers from South Africa... All the talk about water and the water horse (hippo) ignores the truly dangerous rhinoceros, an animal with a congenitally bad temper that may weigh 4,000 pounds or more and that can run thirty miles per hour in order to gore you and crush you under its angry hooves.

**Clark:** Rhino -- Republican hippo in name only?

**Bill:** It's up to Phil. What's that other moniker/acronym that some Rs use, CINO, i. e. conservative in name only.

**Clark:** The theory [Art's Hippo Theory of Civilization] is a good one. Hippos are said to kill more people than any other animal in Africa. River traffic would certainly be affected. I'd love to see Jared Diamond tackle it.

**Dennis:** I remember you telling me this, Clark, when we were in that boat on Lake Kariba surrounded by hippos. I haven't recovered emotionally yet.

**SteveB:** Seriously? That would be most hilarious!

**Clark:** Dennis has, indeed, been an emotional cripple ever since.

**Bill:** Thank you, WFWP for illustrations [below], Dennis. And them rhinos have bad breath, too.

**Dennis:** As an internationally renowned wildlife photographer (stop laughing, Clark), I'd like to add my expertise to the discussion of really big, ugly African animals:



When hippos are in a pool and you are snug on land in a bush buggy, then it's  
NO PROBLEM.



When a rhino is approaching your bush buggy at this angle, then it's  
TIME TO WORRY A BIT.



When a rhino gets this close and stares straight at you, then it's  
TIME TO CR\*P YOUR PANTS!

20120210-11 17:04 Pam "Money and Morals"

"Money and Morals" by Paul Krugman, *New York Times*

Feb. 9, 2012 ([http://www.nytimes.com/2012/02/10/opinion/krugman-money-and-morals.html?\\_r=1&emc=eta1](http://www.nytimes.com/2012/02/10/opinion/krugman-money-and-morals.html?_r=1&emc=eta1))

Lately inequality has re-entered the national conversation. Occupy Wall Street gave the issue visibility, while the Congressional Budget Office supplied hard data on the widening income gap. And the myth of a classless society has been exposed: Among rich countries, America stands out as the place where economic and social status is most likely to be inherited.

So you knew what was going to happen next. **Suddenly, conservatives are telling us that it's not really about money; it's about morals. Never mind wage stagnation and all that, the real problem is the collapse of working-class family values, which is somehow the fault of liberals.**

But is it really all about morals? No, it's mainly about money.

To be fair, the new book at the heart of the conservative pushback, Charles Murray's *Coming Apart: The State of White America, 1960-2010*, does highlight some striking trends. Among white Americans with a high school education or less, marriage rates and male labor force participation are down, while births out of wedlock are up. Clearly, white working-class society has changed in ways that don't sound good.

But the first question one should ask is: Are things really that bad on the values front?

Mr. Murray and other conservatives often seem to assume that the decline of the traditional family has terrible implications for society as a whole. This is, of course, a longstanding position. Reading Mr. Murray, I found myself thinking about an earlier diatribe, Gertrude Himmelfarb's 1996 book, *The De-Moralization of Society: From Victorian Virtues to Modern Values*, which covered much of the same ground, claimed that our society was unraveling and predicted further unraveling as the Victorian virtues continued to erode.

Yet the truth is that some indicators of social dysfunction have improved dramatically even as traditional families continue to lose ground. As far as I can tell, Mr. Murray never mentions either the plunge in teenage pregnancies among all racial groups since 1990 or the 60 percent decline in violent crime since the mid-90s. Could it be that traditional families aren't as crucial to social cohesion as advertised?

Still, something is clearly happening to the traditional working-class family. The question is what. And it is, frankly, amazing how quickly and blithely conservatives dismiss the seemingly obvious answer: A drastic reduction in the work opportunities available to less-educated men.

Most of the numbers you see about income trends in America focus on households rather than individuals, which makes sense for some purposes. But when you see a modest rise in incomes for the lower tiers of the income distribution, you have to realize that all — yes, all — of this rise comes from the women, both because more women are in the paid labor force and because women's wages aren't as much below male wages as they used to be.

For lower-education working men, however, it has been all negative. Adjusted for inflation, entry-level wages of male high school graduates have fallen 23 percent since 1973. Meanwhile, employment benefits have collapsed. In 1980, 65 percent of recent high-school graduates working in the private sector had health benefits, but, by 2009, that was down to 29 percent.

So we have become a society in which less-educated men have great difficulty finding jobs with decent wages and good benefits. Yet somehow we're supposed to be surprised that such men have become less likely to participate in the work force or get married, and conclude that there must have been some mysterious moral collapse caused by snooty liberals. And Mr. Murray also tells us that working-class marriages, when they do happen, have become less happy; strange to say, money problems will do that.

One more thought: The real winner in this controversy is the distinguished sociologist William Julius Wilson.

Back in 1996, the same year Ms. Himmelfarb was lamenting our moral collapse, Mr. Wilson published "When Work Disappears: The New World of the Urban Poor," in which he argued that much of the social disruption among African-Americans popularly attributed to collapsing values was actually caused by a lack of blue-collar jobs in urban areas. If he was right, you would expect something similar to happen if another social group — say, working-class whites — experienced a comparable loss of economic opportunity. And so it has.

So we should reject the attempt to divert the national conversation away from soaring inequality toward the alleged moral failings of those Americans being left behind. Traditional values aren't as crucial as social conservatives would have you believe — and, in any case, **the social changes taking place in America's working class are overwhelmingly the consequence of sharply rising inequality, not its cause.**

20120210-12 18:05 Dennis Photo: Rick Santorum Crowd Reaction

So how's that religious voter thing workin' out for you, Rick?



20120210-13 18:09 Pam Re: Rick Santorum Crowd Reaction (reply to Dennis, above)

A picture really IS worth a thousand words.

20120210-14 18:59 Dennis Palin-Beck 2012

It's Glenn Beck's birthday. Time to soak up some of his infinite wisdom:

<http://politicalhumor.about.com/library/bl-glenn-beck-conspiracy.htm>.

This is still on my bumper. I haven't given up hope.



20120211-05 15:57 Dick Antique Cars

Were you a hot-rodder?

<http://cruzintheavenue.com/CarsWeDrove.htm>

**From SteveG (Feb. 12, 2012, 8:01 am)—Animals Not Allowed on Yakima Zip Lines?**

No hippos, rhinos, alligators, crocodiles, or boars up here – just a few bores.



Andrew Hacker's essay in the NYRB "We're More Unequal Than You Think," should be read by every American and political candidate. At the very least, YOU should read it. Did you know that more homicides and suicides occur under Republican Presidents than under Democratic ones? Did you know that during the 2000s US corporations cut domestic employment by 2.9 million and added 2.4 million workers overseas? Did you know that between 1985 and 2010 income for all Americans increased 7%, while the CEO of Johnson & Johnson saw an increase of 719%?

In my very humble opinion, I suspect the right wing of distracting the public with arguments about religious liberty, class warfare, personal responsibility, and private morality merely in order to keep voters from thinking about the two biggest crises we face: global warming and an expanding income gap.

"We're More Unequal Than You Think" by Andrew Hacker, *The New York Review of Books*

Feb. 23, 2012 (<http://www.nybooks.com/articles/archives/2012/feb/23/were-more-unequal-you-think/>)

Imagine a giant vacuum cleaner looming over America's economy, drawing dollars from its bottom to its upper tiers. Using US Census reports, I estimate that since 1985, the lower 60 percent of households have lost \$4 trillion, most of which has ascended to the top 5 percent, including a growing tier now taking in \$1 million or more each year.<sup>1</sup> Some of our founders foresaw this happening. "Society naturally divides itself," Alexander Hamilton wrote in *The Federalist*, "into the very few and the many." His coauthor, James Madison, identified the cause. "Unequal faculties of acquiring property," he said, inhere in every human grouping. If affluence results from inner aptitudes, it might seem futile to try reining in the rich.

All four of the books under review reject Hamilton and Madison's premises. All are informative, original, and offer unusual insights. None accepts that social divisions are inevitable or natural, and all make coherent arguments in favor of less inequality, supported by persuasive statistics.

*The Spirit Level: Why Greater Equality Makes Societies Stronger* by Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett, Bloomsbury, 331 pp., \$28.00; \$18.00 (paper)

*The Spirit Level* is a prodigious empirical effort directed to a moral purpose. It ranks the quality of life in twenty-three countries, mainly European, but with Singapore, Israel, and the United States also on the list. To evaluate the well-being of each society, Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett use indices ranging from obesity and incarceration rates to teenage births and the feelings people have about their fellow countrymen. They then relate these variables to how income is distributed in each society. Here they deploy the Gini ratio, a three-digit coefficient purporting to measure the extent of income inequality within any grouping for which figures are available. Their national Gini scores range from .230 in egalitarian Sweden to .478 in highly stratified Singapore, with the United States second highest at .450. Linking social indicators to economic disparities, the authors conclude that "reducing inequality is the best way of improving the quality of the social environment."

As income gaps grow, they write, it's not only the poor who suffer. Unequal societies not only bear "diseases of poverty," but also "diseases of affluence." The latter include cancer and cardiovascular disease as well as the afflictions of well-off people who are "anxiety-ridden," "prone to depression," and "seek comfort in overeating, obsessive shopping and spending." At this point, as elsewhere, the authors tend to get carried away. I'm not sure I'm ready to rank compulsive spending or eating too much as diseases. Even so, Wilkinson and Pickett are blunt in their summary: "inequality is socially corrosive." What's missing in their analysis is how far, if at all, income disparities may also degrade the deprived.

The authors don't go so far as to say that people with above-average incomes would end up better off were they to take home less money, and if greater numbers of their poor compatriots had more. But they do contend that "the benefits of greater equality seem to be shared across the vast majority of the population." Thus one of their tables shows that those in the middle class in more egalitarian England have lower rates of cancer and diabetes than their counterparts in the United States. American children don't perform as well academically as their peers in Finland and Belgium, where incomes are not as widely spread.

The broader argument was made by Oliver Wendell Holmes, who reputedly told one of his clerks that taxation is how we "buy civilization." Lower Gini scores generally tell us that the business and professional classes of such countries as Norway and Denmark consent to higher tax rates because publicly provided higher education and health care and cultural amenities make for a more congenial society, in which everyone shares.

Wilkinson and Pickett teach at Britain's University of York, and they aim for an international audience. Yet they seem to have America mainly in mind when they remark that "instead of a better society, the only thing almost everyone strives for is to better their own position." Here too we're into hyperbole. The United States has a large stratum of professionals who choose public service careers; indeed much, even most, of the middle class doesn't set its sights on more than routine personal advancement. Still, it's appropriate to ask how many of the rich care about creating a "better society." Wealth brings higher-quality health care, private schooling, and personal pension plans, along with shielding from lines, crowds, and captious service.

Like many modern studies, most of the findings in *The Spirit Level* derive from statistical formulations. I found myself wanting to know more about the actual people represented by indicators and indices. In Belgium, taxes take 42 percent of an average worker's earnings, compared with 23 percent in the United States; in Denmark, personal income taxes absorb 27 percent of its gross domestic product, against 8 percent in the US. How do their middle-class professionals balance the public and private in their conceptions of the good life? Do they, for example, feel that high take-home pay is needed to bring out people's best efforts? "We see no indication," Wilkinson and Pickett say, "that standards of intellectual, artistic or sporting achievement are lower in the more equal societies." And as a measure of innovation, they show that such countries file more patents per capita. But they don't consider keenly competitive enterprises—such as Apple and Facebook—from which Forbes 400 fortunes grow. We hear it claimed that innovations such as iPhones and iPads are much encouraged by hopes of inordinate wealth. Is there an egalitarian alternative?

There's a limitation to the Gini ratio that the authors don't mention. Because Spain (.320) and Canada (.321) are so close in Gini ratio, *The Spirit Level* would have us conclude they have comparable levels of income. But similar scores can conceal quite different distributions of income. Unfortunately, Wilkinson and Pickett don't explain why. For example, the Gini ratios for New Hampshire (.425) and Iowa (.427) make them relatively egalitarian on the American spectrum. However, New Hampshire gets there by having the same number of high- and low-income households: 26 percent have annual income over \$100,000 with 26 percent under \$35,000. Iowa has almost the same ratio, but only 15 percent of its households make above \$100,000 and 36 percent fall below \$35,000. *The Spirit Level's* message is that if countries want a more equable and equitable society, they should move toward closing their income gaps. But what can we say about Iowa's equality if it still has a substantial low-income segment? Reducing the proportion of the rich may be a pyrrhic victory if poverty persists.

To say that America's rich are getting richer, which is true, is only part of the story. Also important is that considerably more Americans are now enjoying an affluence that was once the preserve of only a very small stratum. Despite Occupy Wall Street's focus on the wealthiest one percent, the rise of two other groups tells us more about recent redistributions. The first consists of households having annual incomes of \$1 million or more, a passable definition of "rich." (Entry to the top 1 percent now comes with \$347,421, which I'd simply call comfortably off.)

As can be seen in Table A, in 1972, altogether 22,887 tax returns were filed with today's equivalent of \$1 million in income. By 1985, the number had expanded to 58,603. And in 2009, the most recent year for figures, this bracket had multiplied to 236,893. In 1972, for every \$1 million household there were 3,393 earning less. Now for every \$1 million household there are only 591 with less. True, the population has grown since 1972, as has the overall income pool. But not nearly enough to explain the expansion at the top.

*Table A*

**MORE ROOM AT THE TOP?**

<i>All in 2010 Dollars</i>	1972	1985	2010
<i>IRS Returns Declaring Over \$1 Million in Income</i>			
\$1 Million+ Returns	22,887	58,603	236,893
Per 100,000 Returns	30	58	162
Share of All Income	1.3%	3.0%	9.5%
Average Tax Paid	47%	37%	25%
Average After-Tax	\$1,159,595	\$1,465,947	\$2,319, 236
<i>Best-Off 5% of Families</i>			
Top 5% Families	2,718,650	3,177,500	3,932,750
Entry Income	\$129,739	\$149,107	\$200,354
Share of All Income	15.9%	16.1%	20.0%
Inequality (Gini) Index	.359	.389	.440

*Sources:* Internal Revenue Service, Bureau of the Census. A lower index signifies a more equal income distribution.

Moreover, the \$1 million (and up) in the three illustrative years was the amount these taxpayers declared as gross income; that is, before they paid taxes to the IRS. As is also shown in Table A, the share of income paid in taxes by this group has declined markedly. In 1972, households in the \$1 million bracket kept 53 percent of what they declared. Today, they retain 75 percent for personal purchases and pleasures. There would still be more rich Americans if their taxes hadn't been reduced, due to the rise in salaries and other sources of wealth at the top. But those abatements have allowed the kind of gilded lives not known for over a century.

Where did all these earners of \$1 million incomes come from? Many are owners of small but prosperous businesses. But even with high-tech start-ups, we don't have more fledgling enterprises than in the past. In fact, the greatest growth in high incomes has been in "financial services." Here what's bought and sold largely amounts to advice, about when people should buy and sell financial holdings, or have holdings bought and sold for them, as with public offerings and investing pension funds.

Financial services also includes devising algorithms for complex securities, like credit default swaps and collateralized debt obligations. In either case, what's being created often seems so arcane that clients don't object to eight-digit fees, which are in turn bestowed as seven-figure bonuses. Or they don't cavil at such payments because they intend to do well themselves. According to Adam Smith, we should expect competitors to emerge, offering the same services at palpably lower fees. While this sometimes happens, customers tend to feel safer with well-known names, including Bear Stearns and Lehman Brothers, until their days of reckoning.

The wish to focus on millionaires is understandable. But the upward movement of money has in fact benefited a second and considerably larger group, the best-paid 5 percent, which includes some four million families. As Table A shows, this group's real earnings have more than doubled since 1972, while its share of aggregate income has grown by almost a quarter. As Table A also notes, it now takes about \$200,000 a year to join this tier. In my view, this stratum warrants at least as much attention as the superrich, not just because there are more of them, but because their paychecks tell us a lot about an emerging pattern of rewards.

*The Darwin Economy: Liberty, Competition, and the Common Good* by Robert H. Frank, Princeton University Press, 240 pp., \$26.95

*The Age of Austerity: How Scarcity Will Remake American Politics* by Thomas Byrne Edsall, Doubleday, 272 pp., \$24.95

Robert Frank's *The Darwin Economy* and Thomas Edsall's *The Age of Austerity* provide much-needed information and analysis to explain why so much of the nation's money is flowing upward. Frank, an economist at Cornell, draws on social psychology to shatter many myths about competition and compensation. While he doesn't explicitly cite the classical French economist Jean-Baptiste Say, much in his exposition echoes Say's axiom that "supply creates demand." This doesn't mean that if items are put on display, people will automatically buy them. Consumers decide what or if they'll purchase, and clearly can only do so if they have the credit or money. Even so, the items they decide they want have been created by the suppliers, who put things on the shelves.

Frank carries this a step further. In recent years, he argues, the products and enjoyments set before us have become increasingly enticing—including houses, vacations, television programs, video games, electronic devices, and the attractions of the Internet. In many cases, the rich acquire them first; since what they have and do becomes widely known, emulation descends down the line.

Nor are these just Tiffany trinkets. Frank's most vivid examples are newly built houses. As the very rich installed grander entrance halls and rarely used bathrooms, the professional classes felt they should have a semblance of such amenities. "By 2007," Frank writes, "the median new single-family house built in the United States had an area of more than 2,300 square feet, some 50 percent more than its counterpart from 1970." Indeed, it's revealing that this expansion was happening as people were having fewer children. However, these homes—along with more elaborate wardrobes, holidays, and technical gear—are costly. If they were to be bought, salaries needed to keep pace.

Hence, I would argue, an unstated but still real compact was made between the employers and the new upper-middle class. Their pay would be raised to support their ascending status. As the samplings in Table B show, while real earnings for the overall workforce have risen only 7 percent since 1985, professions like physicians and professors have done several times better. Incomes of lawyers and executives, for their part, have soared much further than anyone would have forecast a few decades ago.<sup>2</sup>

Table B

**PROFESSIONAL PAYDAYS**

<i>All in 2010 Dollars</i>	<i>1985</i>	<i>2010</i>	<i>Real Increase</i>
<i>All Employed Americans</i>	\$39,044	\$41,919	+7%
<i>Physicians and Surgeons</i>			
Radiologists	\$335,400	\$448,900	+34%
Urologists	\$266,200	\$380,400	+43%
Psychiatrists	\$167,200	\$216,500	+29%
<i>University Professors</i>			
Harvard University	\$132,000	\$193,800	+47%
University of Chicago	\$112,100	\$190,400	+70%
University of North Carolina (Chapel Hill)	\$97,000	\$143,300	+37%
<i>Law Partners</i>			
Wachtell Lipton	\$1,669,000	\$4,345,000	+160%
Kirkland & Ellis	\$850,000	\$3,075,000	+262%
Latham & Watkins	\$819,000	\$1,995,000	+144%
<i>Corporate CEOs</i>			
Union Pacific	\$3,825,000	\$23,060,000	+502%
Occidental Petroleum	\$2,440,000	\$20,130,000	+825%
Johnson & Johnson	\$2,241,000	\$18,360,000	+719%

*Sources: Medical Economics, Modern Healthcare, American Association of University Professors, American Lawyer, Forbes. Men's earnings rose by 2.1% in 1985–2010; women's by 12.2%.*

Rationales aren't lacking for these raises. One is that skills and talents are in short supply for such jobs as video game designers, so higher pay must be proffered to get and keep the better performers. But a more plausible reason is that money to push up pay was becoming available as profits generally increased, and lower-level jobs were increasingly performed by workers abroad. So a tacit compact came into play. Health plans gave doctors most of what they billed, with few questions asked. Colleges, knowing that parents would pay, found they could increase tuition and fees, much of which went to boost the pay of those fortunate to be full-time faculty. Corporate clients didn't object to higher legal fees, at least for top partners, since their overall labor costs were less.

Here Thomas Edsall provides useful information. "US multinational corporations cut domestic employment by 2.9 million during the 2000s, while adding 2.4 million workers overseas," he writes. At the same time, "recession-forced layoffs resulted in increased productivity, which in turn translated into higher profits with fewer workers." In this setting, clubby corporate boards approved eight-figure pay packages to their CEOs, which were seen as affirming the stature of their firms. In these and other instances, accepted standards for corporate compensation went by the board. No one asked what might be a competitive rate for whatever skills were needed; or if there might be equally talented people who would do just as good a job for less.

The crucial fact is that the upward flow of money has reduced the spending power of those lower down, most notably the bottom 60 percent. This loss has had consequences. For example, in a not-so-distant past, families of modest means made enough to put something aside for their children's college fees. That cushion is gone, which is why millions of undergraduates are now forced to take much larger loans. Adding interest and penalties, many will face decades paying off six-figure debts. By way of contrast, parents in the top 5 percent can write full tuition checks, which gives their children an edge in admissions decisions, even if colleges deny this.<sup>3</sup>

James Gilligan has written a quirky book that deserves to be taken seriously. His exposition is based primarily on public statistics, and he uses the numbers responsibly, always allowing for alternative interpretations. His book isn't explicitly about economic inequality, but something graver: death, and its two most dramatic causes, suicide and homicide. Yet even here, how the economy functions is crucial. Gilligan starts with figures on these two ways life may end, for which we have reliable records going back to 1900. The numbers start with county coroners, are forwarded to state health agencies, and are finally collated in federal reports. To be sure, not all deaths have clear-cut causes. We can't always be sure if ingesting too many pills was accidental or intentional, just as a road fatality can be a means of suicide. Gilligan is aware of ambiguities like these and factors them into his equations.

Still, his initial step may raise some questions. For each year starting with 1900, he adds homicide and suicide rates together to yield a "violent death rate," which becomes the principal variable in his analysis. True, a carbon monoxide suicide is in a sense a violent act; but it's not in the same category as plunging a knife into someone else's chest. Gilligan acknowledges the differences in the two kinds of deaths, but they also overlap. At least a few of those who choose to carry lethal weapons know they are rolling dice with their own lives.

The two modes of death involve different groups of people. In 2007, the most recent for figures, there were 34,598 suicides and 18,361 homicides. As it happens, men accounted for precisely 79 percent of both groups of victims. However, relative to their numbers, whites were almost three times as likely as blacks to take their own lives, while blacks had an eight times greater chance of being killed by someone else. Altogether, 56 percent of the men used firearms to end their lives; so did 30 percent of the women.

What makes Gilligan's analysis interesting is his view that the two forms of death have many parallels. Suicide, he argues, may be seen as "self-punishment," the sternest possible reproof, but inflicted on oneself. In a not wholly dissimilar vein, "aggressive behavior toward other people, which can escalate to homicide," is often impelled by resentment over not receiving respect felt to be one's due. (Shots have been fired over parking spaces.) Both sets of feelings are exacerbated, Gilligan argues, when social conditions swell the pool of people who are made to feel "worthless," "shamed," and "redundant."

According to his calculations, "epidemics of lethal violence" are closely correlated with the party affiliation of the president. In the 107 years following 1900, Republicans held the White House for fifty-nine of them, leaving forty-eight for Democrats. He found that for all but fourteen of the 107 years, his combined homicide-suicide rate fell when Democrats were president and rose under Republican administrations. (Eisenhower and Carter accounted for twelve of the fourteen exceptional years.)

Gilligan's most specific surmise is that these linkages result largely from unemployment, which tends to rise under Republican presidents. An inability to find a job, he says, is the foremost driver of feelings of shame and worthlessness. (If this pattern persists, unemployment and violence-related deaths will rise even further if we have a President Romney.) It's obvious that the 52,959 suicides and homicides recorded in 2007 were a minute fraction of the seven million out of work that year. Gilligan, a professor of psychiatry at NYU, conjectures that "they are the tip of the iceberg...underneath which are many times more people who suffer grievously from these stresses but do not respond to them by killing others or themselves."

Gilligan also shows that states usually carried by Republicans have higher homicide and suicide rates, as well as inflicting more deaths in the form of executions. But he doesn't relate this to the job market in these states—an important omission. He considers another explanation. Republicans muster their majorities from just above the median, pitting "members of the lower middle class against the very poorest lower class." So when they take power, they are basically telling Americans who are first to be fired that they no longer count. What I take Gilligan to be saying is that those who are subject to the humiliations of being poor at least sense that when a Democrat is in the White House someone there cares more than would be the case if there were a Republican. This is class analysis with a new twist.

Well, we now have a Democratic president, with three years of high jobless rates. We don't yet have suicide statistics for 2009 and 2010. But figures for homicides are available from the FBI, which collects them from local police departments. In 2009, the national rate for the FBI combined "murder and manslaughter" rate was 5.0 per 100,000 in the population, and in 2010 it dropped to 4.8 per 100,000. By way of contrast, those rates during George W. Bush's eight years averaged 5.6 per 100,000. Thus far Gilligan's inferences are standing up. Despite

disheartening levels of unemployment, having a Democratic administration correlates with a moderately declining murder rate.

While Gilligan doesn't discuss income inequality explicitly, he argues that one of our major parties has no real concern for those below the economic median. Here his book complements the other three. If the Republicans win the presidency, it will be largely with votes from the upper half of the electorate, which provided their needed margin in the 2010 contests.<sup>4</sup> Using this base, the GOP claims that the rich must be cosseted because they are "job creators."

What isn't said is that its business supporters seek the cheapest possible workforce—domestic, immigrant, or foreign—because bonuses and profits rise when payroll costs are low. If this strategy succeeds, the Americans who are most desperate for jobs will face a future as casual labor. (The college "adjuncts" who are poorly paid to do much of the teaching formerly done by upper-middle-class professors are one white-collar harbinger.) Like other overleveraged nations, the US may well be facing Thomas Edsall's "age of austerity." If so, it remains to ask who will be making most of the sacrifices. Americans have votes and voices; much of the decision will rest with them.

<sup>1</sup>See [www.census.gov/hhes/www/income/data/historical/household](http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/income/data/historical/household), Tables H-1 and H-17. All 1985–2010 amounts are in 2010-value dollars.

<sup>2</sup>Frank argues that Darwin's natural selection better explains the results of competition than Smith's invisible hand. To underwrite the "common good"—for which he finds scant concern in Darwin—he would impose onerous taxes on "positional" (i.e., conspicuous) consumption like lavish "weddings and coming-of-age parties."

<sup>3</sup>According to *The Princeton Review*, of the 15,141 students admitted by ten highly competitive colleges last year (the Ivy League plus Stanford and Duke), 48.8 percent were able to pay the full bill, which averaged \$53,158.

<sup>4</sup>See my "The Next Election: The Surprising Reality," *The New York Review*, August 18, 2011.

20120212-03	14:47	Art	"Republicans Undiscover Fire"
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As we all sort through the growing crescendo of political verbiage that precedes the President election still, God help us, many, many months away, I have been struck by what seems to be a virtually constant theme. Every time I read anything about the current President (in AOL the letters below the news items are often more revealing than the new item itself) it is always couched in these vague generalities. "He is a godless communist Nazi out to destroy America." Never any specifics - ever. The e-mail mass send outs I receive blaming him for this or that are virtually all wrong - not just some of them, all of them. ( I use SNOPEs or Fact Checker a lot.) I have asked all of my friends who tend to lean to the right to give just one specific example of his evilness that we could discuss. Nothing. Even the main contenders for the Republican nomination state "Our primary goal is to defeat Obama". What about jobs, or global warming or the deficit?

To me this seems to be missing something - a lot actually. Why is the current president so bad and evil and what must we do to fix this? The below articulates it far better than I could ever do.

Worth a read. The science stuff is particularly interesting.

"Republicans Undiscover Fire" by Mark Sumner, Daily Kos

Feb. 12, 2012, (<http://www.dailykos.com/story/2012/02/12/1063989/-Republicans-undiscover-fire?detail=hide>)

There's a mythology around politics, one that sees the ballot box and the floor of Congress as a battleground of ideas. In this star-spangled arena, progressives and conservatives square off in the competition to prove the worth of their opposing philosophies and the merit of their plans. Of course it's not all high-minded rhetoric and reasoned

discourse, there are selfish motives and personal ambitions, angry outbursts and plain old mistakes, but in the end the best ideas win out in the great experiment that is America! Cue the brass section and wave the flag.

The truth is it was probably never that way. It doesn't take much prompting for people to produce examples of nastiness in campaigns back Jefferson and Adams, or to revisit instances of corruption from decades or centuries gone by. We all know that Mr. Smith is a fictional character.

However, just because it's possible to unearth grizzled examples of ugliness doesn't mean that the current season is not unique. Uniquely dangerous. And what makes it dangerous is the pretense that we're still in that fantasyland where ideas arm wrestle for history's approval. In fact, that time is long past. It's not even that what's now coming from the right consists of 100% emotional, fear-based appeals without a factual basis. In 2012, a campaign of suggestive fear-mongering seems almost quaint.

It's that the Republicans have staked out a position that requires that they lie, 24/7, 365. Not shade the facts their way. Not put their own spin on the situation. Lie. Big, sloppy, and constantly.

The lies go beyond instantly dismissible claims like President Obama being the "food stamp president" (why you have to go back one whole administration to discover that more people joined the food stamp ranks under Bush than Obama, but then the Republicans don't seem to remember Bush in any case). The blatant lies extend through every aspect of the Republican platform, such as it is. The simple reason is that the Republicans have no ideas left, at least no ideas that have not been tested and proven to be failures again, and again, and again.

The economy didn't just crash under a Republican president, it crashed under Republican policies. It crashed with low taxes. It crashed with deregulated markets. It crashed with huge restrictions on union activity. It crashed with massive cuts in environmental regulations. It crashed with lowered trade barriers. It crashed with big fat Pentagon spending.

They got what they wanted. They got CEOs with no limits on their wealth. They got banks with no limits on their "creativity." They got trade agreements that guaranteed manufacturing could be moved to the dirtiest, cheapest, most desperate source available. They got massive cuts in capital gains taxes and equally large boosts in the wealth they could pass along in estates. They got everything they said would make us all wealthy. They got record oil and gas drilling. They got record giveaways of public land. They got everything they said would create jobs. They got the middle class to shoulder more, more, more of the burden so that those beautiful job creators would be free to work their magic.

They can't say the economy crashed because taxes went up, because they didn't. They can't say that the economy crashed because there was a raft of new regulation, because there wasn't. They can't blame it on "union thugs" or Saul Alinsky or the guy who writes Happy Holidays cards at Hallmark. They can't blame it on a president who was elected when the world was already in free fall. Only, of course they do. They say it because they have no choice.

For the same reason that they have to maintain that global warming is the creation of a conspiracy of scientists, and that evolution is a conspiracy of other scientists, and that gay marriage is a threat to "traditional" marriage. They have to lie about the threat of illegal immigrants. Lie about the state of the national debt. Lie about the effects of the President's health care plan. They have to lie, because lies are all they have left.

They certainly can't admit the truth about the economy. They can't admit that they did it. Own it. That their policies directly caused the worst economic failure in American history. Strike that. Make it "the greatest failure in American history since the last time that these same policies were tried." But then, they've been lying about that bit of history for years.

The truth is that the Republicans have nothing to offer. Not even anything that looks like a governing philosophy. Conservatism has moved out of the ranks of political theories and simply become a cult; one that requires that certain phrases be mouthed, that certain hatreds be nourished, and that purity be maintained regardless of cost. That schism with reality is increasingly large and increasingly obvious. They try to paper over that gap by dismissing little things like science, reason, history. Real science fails to support their contentions, so they have to write it off. Reason doesn't work for them, so any question must be met with red-faced indignity — every question a gotcha

question. Real history is full of warts, quirks, and unfortunate truths that don't fit their ritualized beliefs. So they have to try to rewrite history, giving us rewrite Reagan who never raised a tax or increased a debt, rewrite FDR who created the issues he actually solved, rewrite Lincoln who championed the Confederate cause, rewrite founding fathers who never owned slaves, never supported government regulation of the economy, never wavered in their ardent love for a form of religiosity that didn't yet exist. Tricorner hats are the new tinfoil.

The real danger isn't that someone might listen to the Republicans—anyone who lies long enough and loud enough can always find an audience, especially when that someone has three quarters of the television media and ninety+ percent of radio. The danger is that we might forget that they're lying. Too often Democrats, including this president, have felt that the best way to handle Republican fantasies is to compromise with them. You can't compromise reality, no matter how loud the lies.

20120212-04	16:33	SteveG	"300,000 Organic Farmers Sue Monsanto in Federal Court..."
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"300,000 Organic Farmers Sue Monsanto in Federal Court: Decision on March 31st to Go to Trial" by Jane Ayers, NationofChange

Feb. 12, 2012, (<http://www.nationofchange.org/300000-organic-farmers-sue-monsanto-federal-court-decision-march-31st-go-trial-1329059467>)

Little did Willie Nelson know when he recorded "Crazy" years ago just how crazy it would become for our cherished family farmers in America. Nelson, President of Farm Aid, has recently called for the national Occupy movement to declare an "Occupy the Food System" action.

Nelson states, "Corporate control of our food system has led to the loss of millions of family farmers, destruction of our soil..."

Hundreds of citizens, (even including NYC chefs in their white chef hats) joined Occupy the Food System groups, ie Food Democracy Now, gathered outside the Federal Courts in Manhattan on January 31st, to support organic family farmers in their landmark lawsuit against Big Agribusiness giant Monsanto. (Organic Seed Growers & Trade Association v. Monsanto) Oral arguments were heard that day concerning the lawsuit by 83 plaintiffs representing over 300,000 organic farmers, organic seed growers, and organic seed businesses.

The lawsuit addresses the bizarre and shocking issue of Monsanto harassing and threatening organic farmers with lawsuits of "patent infringement" if any organic farmer ends up with any trace amount of GM seeds on their organic farmland.

Judge Naomi Buckwald heard the oral arguments on Monsanto's Motion to Dismiss, and the legal team from Public Patent Foundation represented the rights of American organic farmers against Monsanto, maker of GM seeds, [and additionally, Agent Orange, dioxin, etc.]

After hearing the arguments, Judge Buckwald stated that on March 31st she will hand down her decision on whether the lawsuit will move forward to trial.

Not only does this lawsuit debate the issue of Monsanto potentially ruining the organic farmers' pure seeds and crops with the introduction of Monsanto's genetically modified (GM) seeds anywhere near the organic farms, but additionally any nearby GM fields can withstand Monsanto's Roundup herbicides, thus possibly further contaminating the organic farms nearby if Roundup is used.

Of course, the organic farmers don't want anything to do with that ole contaminated GM seed in the first place. In fact, that is why they are certified organic farmers. Hello? But now they have to worry about getting sued by the very monster they abhor, and even have to spend extra money and land (for buffers which only sometimes deter the contaminated seed from being swept by the wind into their crop land). At this point, they are even having to resort to not growing at all the following organic plants: soybeans, corn, cotton, sugar beets, and canola, ...just to protect themselves from having any (unwanted) plant that Monsanto could possibly sue them over.

"Crazy, crazy for feeling so....."

The farmers are suffering the threat of possible loss of Right Livelihood. They are creating good jobs for Americans, and supplying our purest foods. These organic farmers are bringing Americans healthy food so we can be a healthy Nation, instead of the undernourished and obese kids and adults that President Obama worries so much about us becoming.

So what was President Obama doing when he appointed Michael Taylor, a former VP of Monsanto, as Sr. Advisor to the Commissioner at the FDA? The FDA is responsible for "label requirements" and recently ruled under Michael Taylor's time as FDA Food Czar that GMO products did not need to be labeled as such, even though national consumer groups loudly professed the public's right to know what is genetically modified in the food system. Sadly to remember: President Obama promised in campaign speeches that he would "let folks know what foods are genetically modified." These are the conflict of interests that lead to the 99% movement standing up for the family farmers.

Just look at the confusing headlines lately that revealed that mid-western farms of GM corn will be sprayed with 2,4-D toxins found in the deadly Agent Orange. Just refer to the previous lawsuits taken all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court by U.S. Veterans who tried to argue the dangers of Monsanto's Agent Orange, and high rates of cancers in our soldiers who had to suffer the side effects from their wartime exposures in Vietnam.

In 1980 alone, when all this mess started with corporations wiping out the livelihoods of family farmers, the National Farm Medicine Center reported that 900 male farmers in the Upper Midwest committed suicide. That was nearly double the national average for white men. Even sadder is the fact that some of the farmers' children also committed suicide. Studies show that when one generation of family farmers lose their farms, then the next generation usually can't revive the family business and traditions later.

Jim Gerritsen, President of the Organic Seed Growers and Trade Association, has pointed out that there are 5th and 6th generation family farmers being pushed off their farms today, and because of a "climate of fear" (from possible lawsuits from Monsanto), they can't grow some of the food they want to grow.

These farmers are the ones who have been able to survive the changes over the past twenty years by choosing to go into the budding niche of organic farming. Now look at what they have to deal with while trying to grow successful businesses: Monsanto's threats.

Even organic dairy farmers have had to suffer lawsuits (from Monsanto) when they labeled their organic milk "non-BGH" referring to Monsanto's bovine growth hormone used by conventional dairies.

Consumers want organic food, and they want America's pure food source to stay protected in America. Made in America, organically, is the way of the future, and family farmers and seed businesses should be free to maintain their high standards for organic foods. They deserve protection from Big Agribusiness' dangerous seeds trespassing on their croplands, not to mention the use of pesticides and herbicides on GM crops. The organic industry has an "organic seal" which is also important to the success of family businesses, and even that stamp of quality is threatened by the spread of Monsanto's GM seed contaminating their pure seed banks.

The Banking industry is also partly to blame. Years before the mortgages and home fiasco we have now, the farmers were the first to feel the squeeze. I interviewed Willie Nelson in the 1980's, and he mentioned even then the high rates of farmer suicides, and that Farm Aid was receiving letters from family farmers saying the banks had "called in their loans", even though "we had never missed a payment". Was this just a veiled land grab for fertile lands, or to intentionally bankrupt independent family farmers?

It was so inspiring years ago when Michelle Obama planted an organic garden at the White House. It was a great precedent for the future, but what happened? It was ruined when they discovered sewer sludge from previous Administrations had contaminated their beautiful soil where the organic vegetables were planted. Just one small upset but it was remedied for future plantings. What about our whole country's organic food supply being

contaminated by previous Administrations' bad choices? Why did they ever allow Monsanto to introduce genetically engineered seeds into our pure, organic, and heirloom stockpiles across America in the first place?

Recently, the Obama Administration, in an effort to boost food exports, signed joint agreements with agricultural biotechnology industry giants, including Monsanto, to remove the last barriers for the spread of more genetically modified crops.

But in this recent lawsuit filed by the Organic Seed Growers & Trade Association, it was argued that a previous contamination of a "genetically engineered variety of rice", named Liberty Link 601, in 2006, before it was approved for human consumption, "extensively contaminated the commercial rice supply, resulting in multiple countries banning the import of U.S. rice." The worldwide economic loss was "upward to \$1.285 billion dollars" due to the presence of GMOs...

What are everyday Americans going to do to turn it around, to get rid of Monsanto's genetically modified seeds and its dangerous threat to America's heirloom and organic seed caches?

There is high rate of cancer in America, and eating healthier, especially organic foods, has been shown to have great benefits in beating cancer and other diseases. When we have Agribusiness threatening independent family farmers, which leads to the farmers feeling so scared that they don't even plant their organic crops that Americans need, then perhaps we can all see what the 99% Occupy Movement is trying to say about their conflict of interest and seemingly abuse of powers.

Willie Nelson just released a new poem on You Tube: "We stand with Humanity, against the Insanity, We're the ones we've been waiting for... We're the Seeds and we're the Core, We're the ones we've been waiting for; We're the ones with the 99%."

Monsanto's practices are a clear example of the wrong direction that the 99% want our country to go in. How about shining some light on Monsanto, and before it is too late, realize the dangers of genetically modified seeds which are contaminating the world's food supply.

"Crazy, crazy for feeling so....." 99%.

20120212-05	20:33	SteveB	Fw: Change.org Petition: Stop Chase Bank Foreclosure on Helen Bailey!
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from Change.org:

[http://www.change.org/petitions/chase-bank-dont-foreclose-on-helen-bailey?utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_source=action\\_alert](http://www.change.org/petitions/chase-bank-dont-foreclose-on-helen-bailey?utm_medium=email&utm_source=action_alert)

While Chase misappropriates the memory and image of Martin Luther King this Black History Month, the bank is still going forward with its plans to foreclose on Helen Bailey on Feb. 15.

Helen Bailey is a 78-year-old grandmother who participated in the civil rights movement, worked as a childcare provider for autistic children, and was a community volunteer. She has paid her mortgage since 1999, but now she can't keep up the payments. All she wants is to stay in her home until she dies, in the neighborhood where she feels safe and has lived for nearly quarter of a century. She could have refinanced with a company willing to let her live in the house for free until her death, but Chase Bank would not reduce her principal by \$9,000. She's been paying 7% interest, well above most rates, so Chase could have decided they had made enough. Instead, they have started foreclosure and Ms Bailey could end on the street.

<http://steadyddie.posterous.com/exotic-plants-once-a-century-bloom-in-picture>

Queen of the Andes, Thumi, Bolivia



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

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