



FRIENDS OF THE MIDDLE NEWSLETTER #179 — JULY 11, 2012

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<http://www.FriendsOfTheMiddle.org> FriendsOfTheMiddle@hotmail.com

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Taxes: Not a 'Bad Word'

(posted by Steven W. Baker / SteveB, July 11, 2012)

Ya, I know! The cry-babies most able to pay more taxes, who have received windfalls year after year, have given taxes a very bad name. But let's be brutally honest: the alternative is no America (as we know it). Maybe that's what the rich Regressives really want...?

TAX RATES ON THE TOP TAX BRACKET	
1918	77%
1921	73%
1923	56%
1924	46%
1925	28%
1929	24%
GREAT DEPRESSION	
1945	94%
1955	91%
1965	70%
1975	70%
1980	70%
1982	50%
1987	38%
1993	38%
2003	35%
2008	GREAT RECESSION
2011	"EFFECTIVE" TAX RATE--17% AND STILL DECLINING.
2012	GREAT DEPRESSION II?

"Facts About Obama's Tax Proposal" by Robert Reich, Slate

July 10, 2012, (http://www.salon.com/2012/07/10/the_truth_about_obamas_tax_proposal/)

To hear the media report it, President Obama is proposing a tax increase on wealthy Americans. That's misleading at best. He's proposing that everyone receive a continuation of the Bush tax cuts on the first \$250,000 of their incomes. Any dollars they earn in excess of \$250,000 will be taxed at the old Clinton-era rates.

Get it? Everyone is treated exactly the same. Everyone gets a one-year extension of the Bush tax cut on the first \$250,000 of income. No "class warfare."

Yet regressive Republicans want Americans to believe differently. The editorial writers of the Wall Street Journal say the President wants to extend the Bush tax cuts only "for some taxpayers." They urge House Republicans to extend the Bush tax cuts for "everyone" and thereby put Senate Democrats on the spot by "forcing them to choose between extending rates for everyone and accepting Mr. Obama's tax increase."

Pure demagoguery.

Regressives also want Americans to think the President's proposal would hurt "tens of thousands of job-creating businesses," as the Journal puts it.

More baloney.

A small business owner earning \$251,000 would pay the Bush rate on the first \$250,000 and the old Clinton rate on just \$1,000.

Congress's Joint Tax Committee estimates that in 2013 about 940,000 taxpayers would have enough business income to break through the \$250,000 ceiling – and, again, they'd pay additional taxes only on dollars earned above \$250,000.

All told, fewer than 3 percent of small business owners would even reach the \$250,000 threshold.

A third lie is Obama's proposal will "increase uncertainty and further retard investment and job creation," as the Journal puts it.

Don't believe it.

The real reason businesses aren't creating more jobs is American consumers — whose purchases constitute 70 percent of U.S. economic activity — don't have the money to buy more, and they can no longer borrow as before. Businesses won't invest and hire without consumers. Even as executive pay keeps rising, the median wage keeps dropping — largely because businesses keep whacking payrolls.

The only people who'd have to pay substantially more taxes under Obama's proposal are those earning far in excess of \$250,000 — and they aren't small businesses. They're the fattest of corpulent felines. Their spending will not be affected if their official tax rate rises from the Bush 35 percent to the Bill Clinton 39.6 percent.

In fact, most of these people's income is unearned — capital gains and dividends that are now taxed at only 15 percent. If the Bush tax cuts expire on schedule, the capital gains rate would return to the same 20 percent it was under Bill Clinton (the Affordable Care Act would add a 3.8 percent surcharge).

Funny, I don't remember the economy suffering under Bill Clinton's taxes. I was in Clinton's cabinet, so perhaps my memory is self-serving. But I seem to recall that the economy generated 22 million net new jobs during those years, unemployment fell dramatically, almost everyone's income grew, poverty dropped, and the economy soared. In fact, it was the strongest and best economy we've had in anyone's memory.

In sum: Don't fall for these big lies — Obama wants to extend the Bush tax cut "only for some people," small businesses will be badly hit, businesses won't hire because of uncertainty this proposal would create, or the Clinton-era tax levels crippled the economy,

A ton of corporate and billionaire money is behind these lies and others like them, as well as formidable mouthpieces of the regressive right such as Rupert Murdoch's Wall Street Journal editorial page.

The truth is already a casualty of this election year. That's why it's so important for you to spread it.



"Obama Nailed It on Taxes, Except for One Itty-Bitty Part..." by Jared Burnstein, Slate

July 10, 2012, (http://www.salon.com/2012/07/10/obama_on_taxes_salpart/)

I understand that politics trumps policy right now, such that targeting your opponent looks more important than targeting, say, the economy. But you might think that when there's a large tax cut on the table targeted at the bottom 98% of households, partisans would be able to agree. Of course, you'd be wrong.

Some background: think of the Bush tax cuts — isn't it a bit strange that we're still tussling about these tax cuts enacted a decade ago? — in two pieces: the upper income part that affect households above \$250K, and the rest, typically called the middle-class part. The full set expires at the end of this year. No one wants the middle-class part to expire and the R's want to extend them all.

Some numbers: extending the middle-class part for one year costs \$150 billion — the President said yesterday that if they expire, taxes for middle-income families will go up \$2,200 next year. The price tag for extending the whole package next year is \$210 billion, so the upper-income part alone is \$60 billion for one year. The ten year numbers are: \$3.3 trillion for the whole package, and about \$2.5t for the middle-class part.

Why not just extend them all? Because we simply won't achieve a sustainable fiscal outlook without new revenues in the mix, and the right place to start, both in terms of fairness and economics, is the top of the income scale. The upper-income cuts return \$850 billion over 10 years to the Treasury, simply by reverting to the top rates under Clinton, when the wealthy fared perfectly well, the budget balanced, and growth was much stronger and more broadly shared than in the Bush years.

The fact that these upper-income increases hit only the top 2% — and that's considering both households and small businesses — is also important. They won't hurt the wobbly recovery, as these folks are not income constrained in the first place. I don't expect them to like one bit that their after-tax incomes will be a bit lower under this plan, but the history of such tax changes suggests they'll continue to work, spend, and save in much the same way they would anyway, so I don't expect any macroeconomic impact.

Why not just let them all expire? Because a tax increase to all federal income-tax paying households is both economically worrisome — it would create too much fiscal drag right now — and too much to ask of middle- and upper-middle income families whose incomes were largely stagnant in the 2000s, fell sharply in the recession, and, unlike those at the top of the scale, still don't have much to show for the recovery.

There may well come a time when taxes need to rise below this artificial line in the sand of \$250,000, but it isn't now.

I know the odds of reasonable action here are non-existent, but it would be incredibly refreshingly for policy makers to say, "hey, we all go on about all the uncertainty created by the looming tax expirations. Since we agree on 98% of them, let's extend the middle-class part for a year and keep fighting over the rest."

Finally, if the Pres is being so reasonable here, what's the itty-bit part with which I disagree? It's this, from his remarks on this yesterday:

[Once we extend the middle-class part]...then next year, once the election is over, things have calmed down a little bit, based on what the American people have said and how they've spoken during that election, we'll be in a good position to decide how to reform our entire tax code in a simple way that lowers rates and helps our economy grow, and brings down our deficit..

This is too close to the tax reform trap for my comfort, where you start by agreeing on lower rates and then move on to base broadeners to make up the revenues you lose from lower rates. The risk, of course, is that you get a lot more of the former (lower rates) than the latter (broader base) and we're back in the same soup we're in now.

Also, the logic here is that we'll raise rates now (on folks above \$250K) and lower them next year — which isn't exactly the distant future. I don't think it's good for households, businesses, and economic stability to go tweaking tax rates up and down with that kind of frequency. Let's set them where they need to be, using the Clinton rates as a good template, and leave 'em there.

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[This is a vitally important article for election year. I hope everyone will read it. -SteveB]

"The GOP's Crime Against Voters" by Eugene Robinson, *The Washington Post*

July 9, 2012, (http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/eugene-robinson-the-gops-crime-against-voters/2012/07/09/gJQAopcCZW_story.html)

Spare us any more hooey about "preventing fraud" and "protecting the integrity of the ballot box." The Republican-led crusade for voter ID laws has been revealed as a cynical ploy to disenfranchise as many likely Democratic voters as possible, with poor people and minorities the main targets.

Recent developments in Pennsylvania — one of more than a dozen states where voting rights are under siege — should be enough to erase any lingering doubt: The GOP is trying to pull off an unconscionable crime.

Late last month, the majority leader of the Pennsylvania House of Representatives, Mike Turzai, was addressing a meeting of the Republican State Committee. He must have felt at ease among friends because he spoke a bit too frankly.

Ticking off a list of recent accomplishments by the GOP-controlled Legislature, he mentioned the new law forcing voters to show a photo ID at the polls. Said Turzai, with more than a hint of triumph: "Voter ID, which is gonna allow Governor Romney to win the state of Pennsylvania — done."

That's not even slightly ambiguous. The Democratic presidential candidate has won Pennsylvania in every election since 1992. But now the top Republican in the Pennsylvania House is boasting that, because of the new voter ID law, Mitt Romney will defy history and capture the state's 20 electoral votes in November.

Why on earth would Turzai imagine such a result? After all, the law applies to all voters, regardless of party affiliation. It is ostensibly meant only to safeguard the electoral process and eliminate fraud. Why would a neutral law have such partisan impact?

Thanks to figures released last week by state officials, we know the answer. It turns out that 758,939 registered Pennsylvania voters do not have the most easily obtained and widely used photo ID, a state driver's license. That's an incredible 9.2 percent of the registered electorate.

Most of the voters without driver's licenses live in urban areas — which just happen to be places where poor people and minorities tend to live. More than 185,000 of these voters without licenses, about one-fourth of the total, live in Philadelphia — which just happens to be a Democratic stronghold where African Americans are a plurality.

Could suppressing the urban minority vote really give Pennsylvania to Romney? It probably wouldn't have made a difference in 2008, when Obama trounced John McCain handily. But the statewide contest is often much closer — and turnout in Philadelphia typically is key to a Democratic candidate's prospects. In 2004, for example, John Kerry's margin over George W. Bush in the state was a mere 144,248.

Perhaps these numbers are so intoxicating that Turzai forgot the cover story about how voter ID is supposed to protect the franchise rather than selectively restrict it. His spokesman later explained that Turzai meant "the Republican presidential candidate will be on a more even keel thanks to voter ID" — in other words, there will be a level playing field once the new law eliminates all that pesky voter fraud.

That might be reasonable, except for one fact: There's no fraud to eliminate.

Prodded by GOP political activists, the Justice Department under Bush conducted an extensive, nationwide, five-year probe of voter fraud — and ended up convicting a grand total of 86 individuals, according to a 2007 New York Times report. Most of the cases involved felons or immigrants who may not have known they were ineligible to vote.

Not one case involved the only kind of fraud that voter ID could theoretically prevent: impersonation of a registered voter by someone else. Pennsylvania and other voter ID states have, in essence, passed laws that will be highly effective in eradicating unicorns.

The Pennsylvania law and others like it are under attack in the courts; this week, a federal three-judge panel in Washington is hearing arguments on Texas's year-old law, with a ruling expected next month. Meanwhile, Michigan Gov. Rick Snyder, a conservative Republican, broke with orthodoxy last week and vetoed bills that would have toughened an existing voter ID statute. Maybe the tide is turning. If it doesn't, these laws will potentially disenfranchise or discourage millions of qualified voters.

In a previous column, I wrote that voter ID was a solution in search of a problem. I was wrong: The problem seems to be that too many of the wrong kind of voters — low-income, urban, African American, Hispanic — are showing up at the polls. Republican candidates have been vowing to "take back" the country. Now we know how.

[20120710-10](#)

23:10

Jim

Video: "Why America's Not the Greatest Country" (Jeff Daniels in HBO's "Newsroom")

The most honest three & a half minutes of television, EVER...

HBO has just launched a new TV series called Newsroom. This brief clip is being referred to as the most honest three and a half minutes of TV. You may or may not agree. Nonetheless, it is worth your time...

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=16K6m3Ua2nw>

[AWESOME! –SteveB]

20120710-02

11:10

SteveB

Debate: "American Exceptionalism & the Difference Between the Left & the Right" & "Leftists Continue to Misuse & Undermine American Exceptionalism"

There are ideas which bear positive fruits, then there are the ideas which are destructive to our wellbeing as a nation...

View from the Right: "[American Exceptionalism and the Difference Between the Left and the Right](#)" by Jarrett Stepman, *Human Events*

July 10, 2012. (<http://www.humanevents.com/2012/07/10/view-from-the-right-american-exceptionalism-and-the-difference-between-the-left-and-the-right/>)

The debate over the meaning and value of American exceptionalism is perhaps the greatest political battle of our time, and the national divide echoes the deep schism that tore America apart during the Civil War.

On taxes, government spending, regulation, public unions, federalism and adherence to the Constitution, there is currently an unbridgeable gulf between the Left and Right, creating gridlock in the American political system.

America's current problems can't be solved by simply taking the middle ground and creating a few "grand compromises". That strategy didn't work in the lead up to the Civil War, and it won't save the country today. The path to repair will come down to two competing philosophies, two visions for how the world and the United States are and should be.

My debate with Dr. Eli Zaretsky demonstrates at least several opinions in the ongoing debate between the Left and the Right, and, of course, do not represent all opinions on our respective sides.

While Zaretsky states correctly that America has had deep and lingering problems that have had to be corrected in American history, he both misidentifies the source of America's course correction and dismisses the critical elements that made America not only unique, but great.

Zaretsky states that the origin of the American Left is not in socialism, but in "equality". I believe that history proves that the Left does not believe in the natural rights doctrine that "all men are created equal," the principle that became the ideological underpinning of abolition, and that has no qualms about grievously violating the "Laws of Nature and of Nature's God."

Zaretsky claims that there are three "crises" in which America has stumbled, and has needed the Left to be "fixed". The first crisis was that America was born with slavery still in existence, the second was the Great Depression and the third was in the cultural upheavals of the 1960's.

The New Deal programs of Roosevelt did not bring America out of the Great Depression. America suffered through over a decade of economic stagnation and backtracking until the end of WWII, and the economy only really turned around when government spending was cut and taxes were slashed.

The New Left of the 1960's not only became deeply anti-American in its outlook, but also paved the way for general cultural erosion. Crime rates, drug usage and out of wedlock births have soared, contributing to increased poverty and incarceration.

I would argue, however, that in the first of three crises, the crisis of the house divided, is in fact where Zaretsky's argument for the Left is most wildly off. It was American exceptionalism and American values that were based upon the timeless ideals of the founding that led to the emancipation of all slaves.

The United States of America was born with the institution of slavery still intact in many states, predominantly in the South where it was most lucrative and entrenched.

Zaretsky argues that the Left upholds the idea of "equality," rather than mere government control, and that this is the primary connection of the Left to the abolitionist movement. However, I contend that Zaretsky is not only wrong, but that the Left is ultimately disconnected to the belief in equality espoused by the founding generation, as well as that expounded upon by anti-slavery advocates before the Civil War and the Great Emancipator during the war, Abraham Lincoln.

Part of the foundation of American exceptionalism comes from the country's true founding document written and adopted in 1776, the Declaration of Independence. Thomas Jefferson said of the Declaration in 1825, "Neither aiming at originality of principle or sentiment, nor yet copied from any particular and previous writing, it was intended to be an expression of the American mind, and to give to that expression the proper tone and spirit called for by the occasion."

The Declaration of Independence is based on the natural rights philosophy that is encapsulated in its most famous line:

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.

Zaretsky makes the claim that Americans in the antebellum era were "adamant in their insistence that their freedom to own slaves was being interfered with by an intrusive federal government."

Human bondage in America was not sustained or exacerbated by limited, Constitutional government or free markets, far from it; slavery was sustained by the entirely closed command economy of the Southern plantation and extremely repressive pro-slavery laws on a widespread and eventually national scale. There were state laws that tightly controlled the ability of slaveholders from emancipating slaves even if they wished to do so.

For instance, the Virginia plantation owner, John Randolph of Roanoke was forced to emancipate his slaves after his death in Pennsylvania, because state laws prohibited emancipation in his state of residence.

Restrictive laws regarding slaves were not just instituted on the local or state level, but on the federal as well.

The Fugitive Slave Act, passed during the Compromise of 1850, forced government officials living in free-states to return slaves to their masters under threat of fine, and ensured that citizens aiding a slave's escape could be fined or imprisoned.

Senator Charles Sumner from Massachusetts explained the power of government to uphold slavery and the abomination of the national pro-slavery law in his brilliant "Freedom National; Slavery Sectional" speech delivered in 1852.

Sumner said "there is no national fountain from which slavery can be derived," and that slavery could not be sustained except "by virtue of positive sanction."

To prove that pro-slavery laws were a violation of the natural rights ideas of the founding, Sumner quoted the Supreme Court of Mississippi, "Slavery is condemned by reason, and the laws of nature. It exists and can exist only through municipal regulations."

In his speech, Sumner praised the American founders and American principles, attacking the politicians of his era for turning the American system upside down.

While Sumner and many other abolitionists may have been radical in speech and tone, their values were based in the traditional, natural rights ideas of the American founding and in the Christian morality that had always been present in American society.

This evidence runs counter to Zaretsky's assertion that Abraham Lincoln adopted the phrase "all men are created equal" from "an abstract proclamation of natural rights philosophy, which no one thought contradicted slavery."

The belief that natural rights extended to all mankind did not just belong to Lincoln and men of his era, but reached back to Americans before the separation of the American colonies from England.

James Otis of Massachusetts, who is credited with being the originator of the phrase, "taxation without representation is tyranny," said in 1764:

Does it follow that 'tis right to enslave a man because he is black? Nothing better can be said in favor of a trade that is the most shocking violation of the law of nature, has a direct tendency to diminish the idea of the inestimable value of liberty, and makes every dealer in it a tyrant, from the director of an African company to the petty chapman in needles and pins on the unhappy coast. It is a clear truth that those who every day barter away other men's liberty will soon care little for their own.

This anti-slavery argument was made on the eve of the founding of the United States. These ideas were not based simply on Lincoln's reconstituting and hijacking the phrase "all men are created equal," as Zaretsky claims, but were an expression of the revolutionary ideas of America's founding.

The Left, in contrast, rejects natural rights in favor of "positive rights" or "social justice". Positive rights obligate, or more correctly, force people to give to and work for others. These are not liberties grounded in the natural rights philosophy of the Founding Fathers, abolitionists or Lincoln, but in the class conscious, race conscious and collectivist ideologies of Karl Marx and, ironically, the ultimate defender of slavery, John C. Calhoun.

The Left does not believe that truths, like the equality of mankind or the rights to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness, are immutable and unchangeable.

For instance, the Left today extols the idea of "color-blind racism," which sounds like an oxymoron to most conservatives, but is based on the idea that those that do not support policies such as affirmative action, that "level" the economic and social distinctions between the races, are racists either consciously or subconsciously.

In his 1997 book, *Color-Blind Racism*, Leslie Carr states where "color-blind ideology" comes from. Leslie wrote, "The roots of color-blind ideology are found in classical liberal doctrines of freedom—the freedom of the individual created by the free capitalist marketplace."

Carr wrote:

But why is affirmative action so offensive to conservatives? It recognizes race, they say. But race is a term that ideologically disguises nation. What liberals are really saying whether they like it or not, is that to effectively bring the African American nation under control they had to weaken it, split it, and disperse it... Someday, African Americans will be so thoroughly dispersed throughout White America that no trace of them as a people will remain... It was not unlike President Lincoln's vision of the dispersal and colonization of the freed slaves.

Does the idea of "color-blind racism" echo the spirit of Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech, in which he declared that he wished that his children could live in an America where people could be judged by the "content of their character" instead of their skin color?

The Left, and indeed a faction of the Right (especially the European Right), views the idea of "nation" in the same way that Europeans do. Nationhood and nationalism are based on ethnic solidarity and history rather than principles and an allegiance to a shared system of governance, ideas and values.

The traditional American view of "nationalism" is based more on the civic republicanism of the founding, which stressed duty, loyalty and service to the nation as a whole, not just an ethnic group or "faction" as Madison described in Federalist No. 10.

America's founders attempted to build a love of country based on patriotism and not a loyalty to a specific "faction" or ethnic group. This is what conservatives talk about when they say they believe in "assimilation".

The racial, "color-blind racism" ideas of the Left are twisting and opposing the American values espoused by the Founding Fathers in the same way that the fathers of the Confederacy did.

The vice president of the Confederacy, Alexander Stephens, once said that the Founders were wrong in that "They rested upon the assumption of the equality of the races. This was an error... Our new government is founded upon exactly the opposite of this idea, its foundations are laid, its cornerstone rests upon the great truth that the negro is not equal to the white man."

Stephens based his "truth" not on reason or religion, but on "science," modernity and progress.

If there is a modern day movement that can be compared to the abolitionists, it is the pro-life, anti-abortion advocates on the right who argue that abortion is not just morally wrong from the standpoint of religion, but also a violation of the natural rights of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

While there is a rational argument to be made that a fertilized egg is not exactly equal to a fully grown adult human life, it is also more than reasonable to state that human life, deserving of all the protections that natural rights should entail, begins well before natural birth takes place. That of course, only applies if one believes in natural rights as the Founding Fathers and abolitionists did.

Just as slaveholders cried foul that their "Southern Rights" had been under assault by "agitators" in the North, pro-abortion advocates on the Left try to shut down debate on the issue and make a national policy out of a practice that many Americans find abhorrent.

Just as Chief Justice Roger Taney tried to inaccurately codify slavery and the principle of inequality between the races in the Constitution in the Dred Scott v. Sanford case, so too have those on the Left tried to twist the meaning of the Constitution in the Griswold v. Connecticut and then the Roe v. Wade cases that created a "right to privacy" and nationalized abortion through the "emanations" and "penumbras" of the Bill of Rights.

The best example on the Left who opposes natural rights and rhetorically aligns herself with slaveholders, is Rep. Sheila Jackson Lee (D-Tex.).

Channeling Calhoun's speech about how slavery was a "positive good" for black Americans, Rep. Jackson Lee has called abortion a "needed action" and insisted on calling the heartbeats of fetuses "sounds" as to avoid acknowledging the possibility that fetuses are human life at all.

As the Left blames all of America's sins on so called "reactionary" conservatives, it would not be all that shocking if, 100 years from now, abortion is seen as a great moral stain on America and pinned American exceptionalism and conservatism.

Today there is a need for embracing American exceptionalism instead of rejecting it, especially in America's current age of crisis.

I defined American exceptionalism as close to the generally accepted originator of the term, Alexis De Tocqueville, would have: The prevailing American values of private property, popular government, laissez faire economics, individualism and natural rights. These are the values that conservatives have tried to uphold in their attempt to restore and strengthen America.

Dr. Zaretsky is wrong in his charge that the Right has not achieved a "critical election" and that Ronald Reagan did not create a permanent shift in American politics during the 1980's in the same way that Abraham Lincoln and Franklin Roosevelt did.

Reagan did not have a perfect record and did not accomplish everything he wanted to during his election, however, there was undoubtedly a hard pivot in how Americans viewed government and Reagan laid the foundation for future conservative victories.

Conservative successes included the Kemp-Roth tax reform of the 1980's, which was the largest tax cut in American history, welfare reform and a balanced budget in the 1990's that a Republican dominated Congress forced upon a Democratic president, Bill Clinton, who said that "the era of big government is over," and a whole host of other reforms to limit the size of government taking place at the state level.

These conservative ideas stemmed from the belief that America was succumbing to what De Tocqueville called "soft despotism" which he said, "Does not tyrannize, but it compresses, enervates, extinguishes, and stupefies a people, till each nation is reduced to nothing better than a flock of timid and industrious animals, of which the government is the shepherd."

It was the road to serfdom as described by the conservative thinker Friedrich Hayek that conservatives were trying to steer America away from. Conservatives have tried to ensure that America remains the land of opportunity, not the land entitlements.

For instance, Zaretsky argued that Republicans and establishment Democrats built a "two-tier society" in which people who can "buy private education, health care, housing and security do so, while those who cannot are shunted into second-class, degraded public services, at best." However, it is conservatives that have led the charge to get poor and disadvantaged children out of the "degraded" public schools and into better systems of education through the school choice and charter school ideas first introduced by conservative economist, Milton Friedman. The Left continues to support the "adult interest" of public unions instead of fighting to give American youth a better chance in life.

Dr. Zaretsky is right about one thing, America needs a change in direction. However, it isn't a change toward the soft despotism offered by modern liberalism, and it certainly isn't in the complete violation of natural rights offered by the hard-Left, it is a change toward embracing the doctrines of individual liberty, limited constitutional government and true equality based in natural rights that were passed down by the Founding Fathers.

View from the Left: "[American Exceptionalism & the Difference Between the Left & the Right](#)" by Eli Zaretsky, *Human Events*

July 10, 2012, (<http://www.humanevents.com/2012/07/10/view-from-the-left-american-exceptionalism-and-the-difference-between-the-left-and-the-right/>)

In "Leftists Continue to Misuse and Undermine American Exceptionalism," (*Human Events*, May 23, see below) Jarrett Stepman argues that American exceptionalism is one of the "primary pivot points that now divides the political right and left in America."

As an example of the Left, Stepman cites Barack Obama, who poo-hooed American exceptionalism, explaining that most peoples think their nation is exceptional. As a second example, Stepman discusses my recent book, *Why America Needs a Left: A Historical Argument*, which contends that the Left's essential contribution to American history has come during periods of crisis, such as the slavery crisis, the Great Depression and the Nineteen Sixties.

As Stepman interprets my argument, the Left revels in hard times, since difficulties validate the Left's negative views of America, whereas the Right takes hard times as minor disruptions in a blessed and buoyant history, never abandoning its conviction that America has a special or exceptional destiny.

Stepman is right in one respect: we need a discussion of American exceptionalism. However, he systematically muddies the waters by equivocating as to the meaning of his key terms: "American exceptionalism," "the Left," and "crisis." Let us start with the first.

Stepman confuses two different meanings of the term "exceptional." The first meaning is that the United States is *sui generis*: it does not conform to the usual pattern of national development, especially because it had no feudalism. This was the meaning that Alexis De Tocqueville intended when, as Stepman notes, he first coined the phrase. The second meaning is that America is "exceptional" in the sense of superior, providing an example for others, the famous "city upon a hill." This was not at all what Tocqueville meant. On the contrary, this second meaning stands in tension with the first: a nation that is *sui generis* cannot set an example for others since it does not share their history (for example, feudalism), hasn't faced comparable problems (for example the problem of a peasantry or of a working class), and can't point the way to common solutions (for example, democratic socialism). All a *sui generis* nation can do is lecture others from on high.

Tocqueville's 1831 definition, which Stepman does not cite in full, clearly implies the first meaning. He writes: "The position of the Americans is ... quite exceptional, and it may be believed that no democratic people will ever be placed in a similar one. Their strictly Puritanical origin, their exclusively commercial habits, even the country they inhabit, which seems to divert their minds from the pursuit of science, literature, and the arts, the proximity of Europe, which allows them to neglect these pursuits without relapsing into barbarism, a thousand special causes, of which I have only been able to point out the most important, have singularly concurred to fix the mind of the American upon purely practical objects. His passions, his wants, his education, and everything about him seem to unite in drawing the native of the United States earthward; his religion alone bids him turn, from time to time, a transient and distracted glance to heaven. Let us cease, then, to view all democratic nations under the example of the American people." Tocqueville's meaning could not be clearer. America is an exception. It does not provide the template for others. In no sense does Tocqueville suggest that America is "exceptional" in the sense of superior.

Of course, many people do believe that America is exceptional in the sense of superior. There are multiple sources for this view but the most important is millennial Protestantism. As Ernst Tuveson explained in a brilliant but now largely forgotten 1968 work, *Redeemer Nation*, the founding and subsequent history of America has deep roots in the Protestant Reformation, more even than in the Enlightenment. Whereas medieval Christians argued that what Augustine called "the city of man"—namely society and history—was irredeemably corrupt, some Protestant currents, notably the Puritans, believed that the advent of the millennium could be hastened by human action and "Bible politics."

America became the repository of this idea, a "redeemer nation." Seeing itself as all-good, it identified the devil (who governs the city of man) with a series of political enemies understood as absolute evil. These included the Catholic Pope, slave-holders, Nazis, Communists and, no doubt, Islamo-fascists. I will return to this second meaning of American exceptionalism, namely superiority, but for now let me say that while it has inspired some good, it has blinded the American people to their own faults as well as to the virtues of others.

Let us turn now to the second term around which Stepman equivocates: "the Left." As we shall see, understanding this term will move us toward a more satisfying conception of American exceptionalism. Nonetheless here again, Stepman runs together two different meanings.

One meaning of "Left" is rejection of the market, belief in government, in a word, socialism. The second meaning, the one I argue for in my book, is equality, which may or may not express itself through the market or through government. Stepman wants to affirm American exceptionalism when it comes to the Right, but he refuses to consider the possibility that there was anything exceptional about the American Left. For him, the American Left is nothing more than a copy of the European Left. By way of contrast, I argue in my book that the American Left is *sui generis*—it includes not only socialism but also anti-slavery, feminism, gay liberation and other movements insofar as they have sought to advance the nation's core egalitarian values. Let me explain.

Stepman's antagonism to the Left draws on another famous citation from Tocqueville, one that Friedrich Hayek also favored. According to Tocqueville, "Democracy extends the sphere of individual freedom, socialism restricts it. Democracy attaches all possible value to each man; socialism makes each man a mere agent, a mere number. Democracy and socialism have nothing in common but one word: equality. But notice the difference: while democracy seeks equality in liberty, socialism seeks equality in restraint and servitude." Though artfully phrased, Tocqueville's contrast between individual freedom and socialism is ill-founded and misleading.

The only sort of freedom that is worth defending is *equal* freedom. Unequal freedom is simply domination, the freedom of some to dominate others. Freedom without equality means the freedom to own slaves, the freedom to monopolize markets and exclude others from competing, the freedom to maintain unsafe working conditions or to sell contaminated food or drugs, the freedom to refuse to serve blacks at one's lunch counter, and the freedom to harass female subordinates sexually. The reason America has needed a Left has been to clarify the difference between unequal and equal freedom. Let me illustrate this by discussing the abolitionists, whom I consider the first American left.

Probably all Americans of the early nineteenth century believed in freedom, and none more so than the slave-owners. They were adamant in their insistence that their freedom to own slaves was being interfered with by an intrusive federal government. "Get off my back," they regularly exclaimed. But, of course, it was *unequal freedom* to which the slaveholders were committed. Even the large number of Northerners who opposed slavery was not committed to equal freedom, when it came to race. They wanted to encourage the long-term decline of slavery or to return the slaves to Africa, but they regarded free Negroes as inferior, and aimed to keep them segregated. By contrast, the abolitionists sought to integrate schools, abolish the "Negro pew" in churches, and encourage interracial marriages.

Through their commitment to *equal* freedom, the abolitionists began the process of turning the national self-congratulation and boosterism that had followed the Revolution into a *project*: not that America was exceptional in the sense of superior, but that it could *become* so by ending slavery and accepting the ex-slaves as fully equal fellow citizens. Lincoln adopted the abolitionist ideas in his Gettysburg Address when he turned the Declaration of Independence's words that "all men are created equal," from an abstract proclamation of natural rights philosophy, which no one thought contradicted slavery, into a goal, that of achieving the equality of all of our citizens, something which did not yet exist. The concept of a project— what the philosopher Richard Rorty called "achieving our country"— is the real basis of American patriotism, precisely because it is self-critical: if we are superior, it is because we realize how far we fall short.

The same project was evident in the second American left, the populists, communalists, socialists and radicals who came to the fore during the New Deal and World War Two. Just as slavery would have been abolished without the abolitionists, so a modern state, with regulatory and fiscal capacities, would have been created without the leftists of the 1930s. But the Left helped give the new state the meaning of social equality: a guaranteed minimum in regard to jobs, health care, housing, education and other necessities. The New Deal in general, and Franklin Roosevelt in particular, are often credited with "saving" liberal democracy, meaning that when other nations turned to fascist and communist solutions, the United States held fast to its founding ideals. This is true, but it is not the whole truth. The liberal ideal of freedom survived the Great Depression only by appropriating principles of social equality pioneered by the Left.

Finally, in the 1960s, when a New Left and a New Right arose, both were fiercely committed to individual liberty. What distinguished them, however, was that the New Right criticized and stood aloof from the Civil Rights movement, defending such bogies as "states rights" and opposition to "intrusive government." The New Left, by contrast, built on the abolitionist and New Deal precedents, to advance the country's exceptional project of achieving equal freedom. Just as the Left of the thirties added the ideal of social equality to the ideal of racial equality, so the New Left added the ideal of equal participation.

Understanding the United States as having the project of equal freedom, rather than as already having achieved it, has moved us toward a better conception of American exceptionalism. But we still need to clarify a third term: "crisis." Here, again, there are two possible meanings. In the usual sense, a crisis is an economic downturn or a war from which the nation needs to recover. By contrast, my book reserves the term "crisis" for turning points in the nation's history, periods during which fundamental decisions have to be made as to the society's future direction. It is because we are at such a turning point today that we once again need a Left.

By contrast, Stepman's timeless celebration of private property and markets will get us nowhere. He fails to acknowledge that, in the thirty-two years since the election of Reagan, the Right has failed to close the deal with the American people in the way that Lincoln closed the deal, and Franklin Roosevelt closed the deal.

The Right has never achieved what political scientists call "a critical election," one that creates a new majority, as 1860 created a new majority and as 1932 created a new majority. And the reason for this is simple. Whatever achievements the Right can claim as the champion of freedom, it is *unequal freedom* that it has championed. Not just the Republican Party, but the Clinton-Obama Democratic Party as well, has built and sought to legitimize a two-tier society in which people who can buy private education, health care, housing and security do so, while those who cannot are shunted into second-class, degraded public services, at best.

Far from acting in an exceptional manner, we have thereby missed three great opportunities to offer international leadership: in 1989, 2001 and 2008. We have created a security state that allows the President to kill American citizens at will, which eviscerates the most long-standing and fundamental basis of individual liberty, whether equal or unequal: *habeas corpus*. Any nation that allows that is in danger of losing its soul.

Finally, we can see why we need a Left by considering the disappointments of the Obama Presidency. In his campaign for the nomination, Obama said that we needed to move in a genuinely new direction, but in his Presidency he failed to lead. For example, he defined our economic goal as *recovery* from the financial near-collapse, obscuring the fact that the crisis was structural, and require us to rethink the whole basis of our government. Equally important, he described his goals in terms of some non-existent "center" or "compromise," excluding "extremists" of both Left and Right. By way of contrast, I believe that what the country needs is precisely the kind of debate that Jarrett Stepman and I are having now.

"Leftists Continue to Misuse and Undermine American Exceptionalism" by Jarrett Stepman , *Human Events*

May 23, 2012, (<http://www.humanevents.com/2012/05/23/leftists-continue-to-misuse-and-undermine-american-exceptionalism/>)

The idea of American exceptionalism has become one of the primary pivot points that now divides the political right and left in America. What was once an established and accepted truth about the American people has come under assault by liberal radicals who would rather deny even the existence of American exceptionalism.

President Barack Obama, when asked whether or not he believes in American exceptionalism, said, "I believe in American exceptionalism, just as I suspect that the Brits believe in British exceptionalism and the Greeks believe in Greek exceptionalism."

Washington Post columnist E.J. Dionne penned a column on May 10 called "Obama's American Exceptionalism" in which he said that conservatives were taking a "Western European path of austerity."

"The Obama administration, by contrast, has chosen a distinctly American path that kept austerity at bay," Dionne said.

Dionne went on to say. "Obama's thoroughly moderate economic policies are an excellent example of a practical American exceptionalism."

Although Obama tends to guard his words in order to sound moderate, many of his liberal allies have no qualms about directly attacking the idea of American exceptionalism.

Another recent article by Terrence McCoy in *The Atlantic* took a different track and claimed that the term "American exceptionalism" originated with Soviet dictator Joseph Stalin, not the frequently attributed early 19th century French observer of American life, Alexis de Tocqueville.

All of these liberal statements on American exceptionalism are either based on an ignorance of its origin or an egregious abuse of its meaning.

Tocqueville is often given credit as the originator of the term because he wrote in his famous treatise *Democracy in America*, "The position of the Americans is therefore quite exceptional, and it may be believed that no democratic people will ever be placed in a similar one."

Stalin said of the American Communist Party, that it had the "heresy of American exceptionalism," which is how McCoy tries to tie the origination of the idea of American exceptionalism to the brutal Soviet dictator instead of Tocqueville.

McCoy wrote that this was meant not as a compliment but a ridicule of America for its "abnormalities." McCoy then goes on to claim that the idea of American exceptionalism became big "a few years ago."

However, the argument of McCoy on other liberals is merely over the etymology of the phrase instead of the ideas behind it.

Leftists clearly mean to denigrate American exceptionalism as a fictitious term created by conservative Republicans a few decades ago, instead of a timeless characteristic of the American experience.

American exceptionalism has even earlier roots than Tocqueville. American colonist John Winthrop gave a speech in 1630 called "A Model of Christian Charity," also known as the "Shining City Upon a Hill" speech, in which he explained the special conditions of the New World and its incredible potential for the future.

"For we must consider that we shall be as a **city upon a hill**. The eyes of all people are upon us. So that if we shall deal falsely with our God in this work we have undertaken, and so cause Him to withdraw His present help from us, we shall be made a story and a by-word through the world," Winthrop said.

That Stalin meant to use the term "American exceptionalism" as a way to ridicule America should really be considered a positive instead of a negative. It was American exceptionalism that prevented communism from ever taking hold in the United States; the values of private property, popular government, individualism, and natural rights prevailed over the statist and collectivist ideas that took hold of countries throughout the world.

Tocqueville said, "Democracy extends the sphere of individual freedom, socialism restricts it. Democracy attaches all possible value to each man; socialism makes each man a mere agent, a mere number. Democracy and socialism have nothing in common but one word: equality. But notice the difference: while democracy seeks equality in liberty, socialism seeks equality in restraint and servitude."

As America was burgeoning into a powerful new country in the early 19th century, observers inside and out of the United States began to understand and express the ideas underpinning American exceptionalism.

The great American orator and statesman, Daniel Webster, who was originally from New Hampshire, but spent most of his political career in Massachusetts, described the special American character in a few famous orations.

In the Plymouth Oration in 1820, celebrating the Pilgrims who landed at Plymouth Rock, Webster said, "They left behind them the whole feudal policy of the other continent. The character of their political institutions was determined by the fundamental laws respecting property."

In this statement Webster was describing how Americans left behind feudal and aristocratic institutions in Europe. There were no great class divides in America even before it became a country.

Webster further described the historical American character in his Bunker Hill Address in 1825:

They were accustomed to representative bodies and the forms of free government; they understood the doctrine of the division of power among different branches, and the necessity of checks on each. The character of our countrymen, moreover, was sober, moral, and religious; and there was, little in the change to shock their feelings of justice and humanity, or even to disturb an honest prejudice. We had no domestic throne to overturn, no privileged orders to cast down, no violent changes of property to encounter. In the American Revolution, no man sought or wished for more than to defend and enjoy his own.

All of the statements and observations about what construes American exceptionalism originated in the 18th century, were expounded upon and advanced in the 19th century and became the most critical factors in saving Western Civilization in the 20th century.

These American values are antithetical to the left-wing agenda, something educated liberals are keenly aware of. That is why they must discredit and subvert them at every opportunity, hence the attempted connection of American exceptionalism to Stalin.

In an article titled, "Why America Needs the Left", written by Eli Zaretsky, a professor of history at the New School for Social Research in New York City, the author reveals the values that are at the heart of American liberalism and why they are out of step with the most deeply held American values.

Zaretsky wrote, "The American Left inherited the idea of a crisis from Marx, not just the kind of 'economic crisis' that characterized the Great Depression and that afflicts the country today, but also broader crises reflecting Marx's influence on modern historiography."

For the American left to survive in America there must be a crisis, according to Zaretsky. This is the only way that Americans will even consider abandoning their values. He claims that the three crises were "slavery, corporate capitalism and hyper-globalization."

The connection to the left and abolition is fairly shaky, as the people that were most extreme in trying to free the slaves were either extremely religious, like Harriet Beecher Stowe, or considered the Constitution to be foundation for undoing the "peculiar institution" of slavery forever, such as in the case of men like former slave Frederick Douglas.

Modern parallels to abolitionists can probably more accurately be drawn to pro-life advocates calling for the end of abortion or Tea Party protestors demanding a return to the Constitution. These people are by no means a part of the liberal coalition in America.

The French writer, J. Hector St. John De Crevecoeur, who became a naturalized American citizen, was the first to write about the character of the American people after the nation was formed.

Crevecoeur wrote in his *Letters from an American Farmer* in 1782, "Here individuals of all nations are melted into a new race of men, whose labours and posterity will one day cause great changes in the world," he continued, "The American ought therefore to love this country much better than that wherein either he or his forefathers were born. Here the rewards of his industry follow with equal steps the progress of his labour; his labour is founded on the basis of nature, self-interest; can it want a stronger allurements?"

What Crevecoeur was explaining was the American dream; the idea that every American has a chance to succeed based on their own merit, and that equality is achieved by unleashing humanity to pursue what is in their own self-interest. He is describing the melting pot that has been, and always should be, a part of the American ethic.

Embracing the idea of the melting pot is how America achieves racial and ethnic equality without losing its most deeply held values, something leftists have no desire to retain or restore.

Liberals have to fight traditional American ideals, because they stand in the way of the leftist radical agenda. They need to promote the idea of the "salad bowl" so that racial division continues, which is their only hope of creating the kind of class conflict and envy that allowed other countries to succumb to leftist ideology.

Counter to what E.J. Dionne claimed in his column, American exceptionalism does not stem from the policies of the president or any other governmental institution for that matter.

American exceptionalism is based on traditional characteristics embraced by American culture and described by Tocqueville: liberty, equality of opportunity, individualism, popular government and laissez-faire economics. It runs counter to collectivism, top-down government control, a massive and unaccountable bureaucratic-administrative state and equality of outcome.

These are the collectivist and statist ideologies that America resisted and defeated in the 20th century. It is why liberals must claw and scratch at every opportunity to undermine America's very old, yet radically different values.

20120710-03	12:37	SteveB	"How to Think"
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"How to Think" by Chris Hedges, Truthdig/NationofChange

July 10, 2012, (<http://www.nationofchange.org/how-think-1341922195>)

Cultures that endure carve out a protected space for those who question and challenge national myths. Artists, writers, poets, activists, journalists, philosophers, dancers, musicians, actors, directors and renegades must be tolerated if a culture is to be pulled back from disaster. Members of this intellectual and artistic class, who are usually not welcome in the stultifying halls of academia where mediocrity is triumphant, serve as prophets. They are dismissed, or labeled by the power elites as subversive, because they do not embrace collective self-worship. They force us to confront unexamined assumptions, ones that, if not challenged, lead to destruction. They expose the ruling elites as hollow and corrupt. They articulate the senselessness of a system built on the ideology of endless growth, ceaseless exploitation and constant expansion. They warn us about the poison of careerism and the futility of the search for happiness in the accumulation of wealth. They make us face ourselves, from the bitter reality of slavery and Jim Crow to the genocidal slaughter of Native Americans to the repression of working-class movements to the atrocities carried out in imperial wars to the assault on the ecosystem. They make us unsure of our virtue. They challenge the easy clichés we use to describe the nation—the land of the free, the greatest country on earth, the beacon of liberty—to expose our darkness, crimes and ignorance. They offer the possibility of a life of meaning and the capacity for transformation.

Human societies see what they want to see. They create national myths of identity out of a composite of historical events and fantasy. They ignore unpleasant facts that intrude on self-glorification. They trust naively in the notion of linear progress and in assured national dominance. This is what nationalism is about—lies. And if a culture loses its ability for thought and expression, if it effectively silences dissident voices, if it retreats into what Sigmund Freud called "screen memories," those reassuring mixtures of fact and fiction, it dies. It surrenders its internal mechanism for puncturing self-delusion. It makes war on beauty and truth. It abolishes the sacred. It turns education into vocational training. It leaves us blind. And this is what has occurred. We are lost at sea in a great tempest. We do not know where we are. We do not know where we are going. And we do not know what is about to happen to us.

The psychoanalyst John Steiner calls this phenomenon "turning a blind eye." He notes that often we have access to adequate knowledge but because it is unpleasant and disconcerting we choose unconsciously, and sometimes consciously, to ignore it. He uses the Oedipus story to make his point. He argued that Oedipus, Jocasta, Creon and the "blind" Tiresias grasped the truth, that Oedipus had killed his father and married his mother as prophesized, but they colluded to ignore it. We too, Steiner wrote, turn a blind eye to the dangers that confront us, despite the plethora of evidence that if we do not radically reconfigure our relationships to each other and the natural world, catastrophe is assured. Steiner describes a psychological truth that is deeply frightening.

I saw this collective capacity for self-delusion among the urban elites in Sarajevo and later Pristina during the wars in Bosnia and Kosovo. These educated elites steadfastly refused to believe that war was possible although acts of violence by competing armed bands had already begun to tear at the social fabric. At night you could hear gunfire. But they were the last to "know." And we are equally self-deluded. The physical evidence of national decay—the crumbling infrastructures, the abandoned factories and other workplaces, the rows of gutted warehouses, the closure of libraries, schools, fire stations and post offices—that we physically see, is, in fact, unseen. The rapid and terrifying deterioration of the ecosystem, evidenced in soaring temperatures, droughts, floods, crop destruction, freak storms, melting ice caps and rising sea levels, are met blankly with Steiner's "blind eye."

Oedipus, at the end of Sophocles' play, cuts out his eyes and with his daughter Antigone as a guide wanders the countryside. Once king, he becomes a stranger in a strange country. He dies, in Antigone's words, "in a foreign land, but one he yearned for."

William Shakespeare in *King Lear* plays on the same theme of sight and sightlessness. Those with eyes in *King Lear* are unable to see. Gloucester, whose eyes are gouged out, finds in his blindness a revealed truth. "I have no way, and therefore want no eyes," Gloucester says after he is blinded. "I stumbled when I saw." When Lear banishes his only loyal daughter, Cordelia, whom he accuses of not loving him enough, he shouts: "Out of my sight!" To which Kent replies:

See better, Lear, and let me remain the true blank of thine eye.

The story of Lear, like the story of Oedipus, is about the attainment of this inner vision. It is about morality and intellect that are blinded by empiricism and sight. It is about understanding that the human imagination is, as William Blake saw, our manifestation of Eternity. "Love without imagination is eternal death."

The Shakespearean scholar Harold Goddard wrote: "The imagination is not a faculty for the creation of illusion; it is the faculty by which alone man apprehends reality. The 'illusion' turns out to be truth." "Let faith oust fact," Starbuck says in *Moby-Dick*.

"It is only our absurd 'scientific' prejudice that reality must be physical and rational that blinds us to the truth," Goddard warned. There are, as Shakespeare wrote, "things invisible to mortal sight." But these things are not vocational or factual or empirical. They are not found in national myths of glory and power. They are not attained by force. They do not come through cognition or logical reasoning. They are intangible. They are the realities of beauty, grief, love, the search for meaning, the struggle to face our own mortality and the ability to face truth. And cultures that disregard these forces of imagination commit suicide. They cannot see.

"How with this rage shall beauty hold a plea," Shakespeare wrote, "Whose action is no stronger than a flower?" Human imagination, the capacity to have vision, to build a life of meaning rather than utilitarianism, is as delicate as a flower. And if it is crushed, if a Shakespeare or a Sophocles is no longer deemed useful in the empirical world of business, careerism and corporate power, if universities think a Milton Friedman or a Friedrich Hayek is more important to their students than a Virginia Woolf or an Anton Chekhov, then we become barbarians. We assure our own extinction. Students who are denied the wisdom of the great oracles of human civilization—visionaries who urge us not to worship ourselves, not to kneel before the base human emotion of greed—cannot be educated. They cannot think.

To think, we must, as Epicurus understood, "live in hiding." We must build walls to keep out the cant and noise of the crowd. We must retreat into a print-based culture where ideas are not deformed into sound bites and thought-terminating clichés. Thinking is, as Hannah Arendt wrote, "a soundless dialogue between me and myself." But thinking, she wrote, always presupposes the human condition of plurality. It has no utilitarian function. It is not an end or an aim outside of itself. It is different from logical reasoning, which is focused on a finite and identifiable goal. Logical reason, acts of cognition, serve the efficiency of a system, including corporate power, which is usually morally neutral at best, and often evil. The inability to think, Arendt wrote, "is not a failing of the many who lack brain power but an ever-present possibility for everybody—scientists, scholars, and other specialists in mental enterprises not excluded."

Our corporate culture has effectively severed us from human imagination. Our electronic devices intrude deeper and deeper into spaces that were once reserved for solitude, reflection and privacy. Our airwaves are filled with the tawdry and the absurd. Our systems of education and communication scorn the disciplines that allow us to see. We celebrate prosaic vocational skills and the ridiculous requirements of standardized tests. We have tossed those who think, including many teachers of the humanities, into a wilderness where they cannot find employment, remuneration or a voice. We follow the blind over the cliff. We make war on ourselves.

The vital importance of thought, Arendt wrote, is apparent only "in times of transition when men no longer rely on the stability of the world and their role in it, and when the question concerning the general conditions of human life, which as such are properly coeval with the appearance of man on earth, gain an uncommon poignancy." We never need our thinkers and artists more than in times of crisis, as Arendt reminds us, for they provide the subversive narratives that allow us to chart a new course, one that can assure our survival.

"What must I do to win salvation?" Dimitri asks Starov in *The Brothers Karamazov*, to which Starov answers: "Above all else, never lie to yourself."

And here is the dilemma we face as a civilization. We march collectively toward self-annihilation. Corporate capitalism, if left unchecked, will kill us. Yet we refuse, because we cannot think and no longer listen to those who do think, to see what is about to happen to us. We have created entertaining mechanisms to obscure and silence the harsh truths, from climate change to the collapse of globalization to our enslavement to corporate power, that will mean our self-destruction. If we can do nothing else we must, even as individuals, nurture the private dialogue and the solitude that make thought possible. It is better to be an outcast, a stranger in one's own country, than an outcast from one's self. It is better to see what is about to befall us and to resist than to retreat into the fantasies embraced by a nation of the blind.

20120710-04	13:19	SteveB	Fw: Ultraviolet Petition: Tell Congress It's Time to Move On!
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from Ultraviolet:

Tomorrow [TODAY!], Republicans in Congress are going to vote, again, to repeal the Affordable Care Act--the most pro-woman piece of legislation in decades, and a law that is going to help tens of millions of people get health care who wouldn't otherwise be able to afford it.

They tried to defeat the bill in 2010 and they failed. They tried to get the Supreme Court to overturn it and they failed. They tried to gut birth control coverage in the bill and they failed. In fact, this will be the fourth time they have voted to completely repeal the whole law in the last few years.

Far-right conservatives have succeeded at one thing though, distracting Congress from dealing with serious issues facing our country, like the economy.

It's time for all of us to rise up and send a strong message to these politicians: Enough is enough. Can you sign this petition telling Congress that health care is here to stay and it's well past time to move on to urgent business--like creating jobs and ending pay discrimination against women and families?

Add your name to the petition:

<http://act.weareultraviolet.org/cms/sign/moveon/>.

The fact is that when health care reform passed and the Supreme Court upheld the law, millions of working Americans won and billionaire insurance company CEOs lost. These members of Congress just can't accept that--and they want their giant corporate donors to know it.

In the last few years, the right-wing Congress has tried to:

- Take away health care from women and families, votes they have taken repeatedly.
- Cut funding for Planned Parenthood--the only source of health care for millions of low-income women.
- Restrict access to reproductive health care.
- Take away birth control coverage from millions of women.

Jobs? This Congress has failed to create a single job in these last two years. But they did manage to:

- Reject equal pay protections for women.
- Refuse to allow women and families paid sick leave so that they can care for their ailing parents or kids--or themselves--without fear of losing their jobs.
- Roll back protections for survivors of domestic abuse--leaving millions of women at greater risk of violence.

This is crazy. And it's time to let them know that we, women and men voters all over the country, are paying attention and aren't going to let them get away with distraction politics.

Thanks for speaking out, --Nita, Shaunna and Kat, the UltraViolet team

20120710-05 14:28 SteveG "Surplus Scrutiny" [in Indiana]

Below is how Indiana built their surplus, balancing the budget and creating a \$2 billion surplus. An example of how republicans/conservatives want to do it?

"Surplus Scrutiny" [in Indiana], Ft. Wayne Journal Gazette editorial

July 6, 2012, (<http://www.journalgazette.net/article/20120706/EDIT07/307069994/1147/EDIT07>)

The tax credit Indiana taxpayers will receive next year as a result of the state's \$2 billion surplus will be welcome relief for some, but all taxpayers should consider where it came from. The need for some families would be less if painful cuts in services hadn't been made to create the surplus.

In announcing the budget news this week, Gov. Mitch Daniels couldn't say how much of the money came from cuts in state agency spending versus growing state revenues. While it's true that Indiana is seeing economic growth, it's also a fact that agencies were directed to cut millions in spending.

For example:

- Almost 40 percent of the Indiana Department of Veterans Affairs budget was cut, to revert \$293,000 to the state's general fund.
- Reductions in K-12 education spending totaled \$325.5 million, or 4.7 percent of the Department of Education's general fund appropriation.
- At the Department of Labor, \$2.7 million was cut, or 52 percent of the agency's general fund appropriation.
- The Department of Child Services slashed nearly \$104 million in spending, for 16.5 percent of its budget.
- The State Fair Commission gave back more than \$1 million last year, or nearly 63 percent of the appropriation approved by the General Assembly.
- Almost 8.5 percent of the appropriation for Family and Social Services Administration was cut – a total of \$63.5 million.

Among those cuts were some programs vital to low-income Hoosiers. The \$1 million general fund appropriation for the Housing and Community Development Authority was eliminated. Those were dollars that would have helped families, seniors, veterans and people with disabilities find affordable housing. Also eliminated was a \$300,000 allocation to buy Indiana-produced food for food banks.

Cutting spending during a recession and its aftermath is good policy as long as the cuts don't create more harm. In Illinois, Gov. Pat Quinn last week announced additional cuts for a total reduction of \$1.4 billion in spending, but noted his objection to the legislature's cuts to education and the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services. He pledged to reallocate money this fall toward child protection.

"Our priority should always be the safety and well-being of our children," Quinn said in a news release.

By contrast, Indiana officials announced last week that child protection services will be cut by \$16 million this fiscal year – a much kinder cut than the 2011 reduction, but a reduction nonetheless.

The state's surplus also overlooks a \$1.7 billion debt Indiana owes to the federal government for unemployment insurance loans it began taking out in December of 2008. Nor does it acknowledge a pending independent audit of the state's tax collection system, following disclosure of errors by the Department of Revenue that cost local governments about \$200 million.

In addition to triggering a tax credit, the legislation the General Assembly put in place in the event of a surplus should trigger study and debate over the long-term effects of the cuts that contributed to it.

[20120710-06](#) 15:10 Art Re: "Surplus Scrutiny" [in Indiana] (reply to SteveG, above)

But people who make \$20 or \$30 Million need a tax break. Cm'on. Where's your priorities.

[20120710-07](#) 16:21 SteveG Re: "Surplus Scrutiny" [in Indiana] (reply to Art, above)

My blind trusts!

[20120710-08](#) 16:27 SteveB Fw: US Action Action: Tell Congress to Get to Work!

Tomorrow will be the 31st opportunity wasted by the GOP.

When they vote to repeal Obamacare for the 31st time, they will be wasting another opportunity to do the work we sent them to Washington to do.

Thirty-one opportunities wasted to pass a jobs bill to put people back to work.

Thirty-one opportunities wasted to side with their constituents, not the insurance companies.

Thirty-one opportunities wasted to help rebuild the middle class in this country.

Join us in calling on Congress to stop wasting opportunities and get to work:

http://act.truemajorityaction.org/p/dia/action3/common/public/?action_KEY=415&track=tw.

Sincerely, David Elliot, USAction / TrueMajority

[20120710-09](#) 16:59 SteveB Fw: MoveOn Action: Contribute to Ads Defining Mitt Romney as the Candidate of the 1%!

from MoveOn:

In 2004, MoveOn made an ad about George Bush that was one of the most covered political ads, for the least money, in history—meaning, tens of millions more people saw it than we paid to show it to.¹

Two weeks ago I asked our creative team to do it again—to give me the very best ideas they had for ads or videos to show that Mitt Romney would be great for the 1%, but terrible for the rest of us.

I just got the scripts back, and I'm totally blown away—I was hoping for one breakout hit, but there are at least six that are memorable, hilarious, and devastating—each one as good as or better than our ad in 2004.

Now we're in a pickle because we didn't budget for that many ads. So I'm coming to you for help.

It's hard to overstate how crucial it is for progressives to define Romney. He's gaining in the polls, and the election looks increasingly daunting. Last month, the Romney campaign hauled in \$106 million, blowing away the Obama campaign for a second month in a row. If this keeps up, President Obama could be the first presidential incumbent to be outspent in modern history—and that doesn't even count the Super PACs.²

We can't compete with that directly—we don't have \$9 million to drop in one day on attack ads like the Kochs do.³ But we can make and air these ads for \$600,000, and I think they're powerful enough to generate tens of millions of dollars worth of media coverage, spreading our message exponentially and making your contributions really compete with big money donors. We just need to raise the money to do it.

Can you chip in \$5 to make these devastating ads about Mitt Romney? Click here to donate \$5:

https://pol.moveon.org/donate/romney_ads.html?bg_id=hpc5&id=45883-20195165-VNDZmx&t=1.

The weakness of the economy means that President Obama faces an uphill battle. A Romney victory would be a catastrophe—he's promised to slash vital programs like Medicare, Social Security, and environmental protection, and repeal Obamacare, while giving a huge round of tax breaks to the 1%. He'd also be in a position to nominate up to three Supreme Court justices in his first term, skewing the court further to the right for a generation.

But the more voters learn about Romney's history with Bain Capital, and policies favoring the very rich, the less they like him. That's why it's so urgent to get the message out.

The right ad can swing an election—that's what the Swift Boat veterans did to John Kerry. Theirs was a lie, while ours are just as powerful—but true.

We just need to raise the money to get these ads made and on the air while there's still time to define Romney. Please help!

Thanks for all you do. –Justin, Laura, Emily, Victoria, and the rest of the team

Sources:

¹"Censored at the Super Bowl," Newsweek, January 29, 2004, <http://www.moveon.org/r?r=277117&id=45883-20195165-VNDZmx&t=4>.

²"Romney raises more than \$106 million in June," CBS, July 9, 2012, <http://www.moveon.org/r?r=277095&id=45883-20195165-VNDZmx&t=5>.

³"Koch-backed group launches \$9 million ad campaign against health law," The Hill, June 29, 2012, <http://www.moveon.org/r?r=277118&id=45883-20195165-VNDZmx&t=6>.



So let me get this straight...

The plan was to move factories and manufacturing overseas, open strip malls on every corner, make it near impossible for our small businesses to compete, force most of us into the service industry, THEN cut our wages, give us little or no health insurance, take away regulations that protect us, and our right to bargain collectively?

Um, Yeah....NO!

www.facebook.com/serviceworkers

"Desert Sounds" by Howard Altmann, Slate

July 10, 2012, (http://www.slate.com/articles/arts/poem/2012/07/desert_sounds_by_howard_altmann.html)

The iguana is still under the rock.
Blossoms unfurl scents over coiled snakes.
Saguaros arm their shadows
With the long legs of daylight.
And whose limbs got buried where
The grand inquisitor unearths deeply.
So it goes in the Sonoran desert.
Sky shows its teeth with cacti.
The mouth of civilization spits out sand.
Who are we, who are we?
The heart of the blue-throated hummingbird beats
Up to twelve hundred times a minute.
The palm-sized bird can play its hand backward too.
With good reason metaphors stay open past midnight.
When desert sounds coax silence into submission.
When darkness branches off.
O the miss in mystery; the hiss in history.
The tap in a child's tapping: *wake up, wake up.*

<http://www.smashinglists.com/beautiful-spectacular-desert-oases/>

http://www.blueplanetbiomes.org/sonoran_desert.htm



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

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