



FRIENDS OF THE MIDDLE NEWSLETTER #230 — SEPT. 20, 2012

Welcome to always lively political discussion and whatever else comes up.
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INDEX: Click here.

R0mney's Redistribution Deception

(posted by Steven W. Baker / SteveB, Sept. 20, 2012)

I find it so odd that, in an economy designed by Republicans to efficiently redistribute money from the poor to the rich, Republicans would want to bring up the subject of income redistribution. I guess they don't think we can see through the tissue paper of their lies. We were asleep for far too long. Time to wake up!

"Romney's Greatest Deception" by Aaron Belkin, Huffington Post

Posted: 09/19/2012, (http://www.huffingtonpost.com/aaron-belkin/romneys-greatest-deceptio_b_1895669.html)



Mitt Romney has been widely panned for blaming 47 percent of the public for its sense of entitlement, its demand that government redistribute wealth downward, away from rich people who earn their money honestly and down to poor and middle-income Americans who just want handouts.

While observers have rightly pointed out that most Americans work hard and take responsibility for their circumstances, less attention has been devoted to the deceptive premise behind Romney's remarks, namely that government redistributes wealth downward from the rich to the poor. In fact, our taxation system funnels money from the bottom up to the top. It's the rich who get the handouts. Either Romney doesn't understand that, or he's not telling the truth about it.

Consider housing. Romney would probably prefer that the Department of Housing and Urban Development not spend its budget of about \$50 billion per year, much of which subsidizes low-income housing. From Romney's point of view, the federal government provides housing handouts by redistributing money downward and subsidizing residences for the poor.

But when we step back and look at overall federal spending on housing, it becomes clear that the federal government spends a lot more money subsidizing housing for the rich than for the poor. In fact, the federal government collects taxes from the poor and then re-allocates those funds as housing subsidies for the rich. How does this work?

To understand how this particular mechanism as well as the tax system more broadly funnels money from the poor to the rich, it's first necessary to point out that when the federal government decides to spend \$1 dollar, that is exactly the same as a decision not to collect \$1 dollar in taxes. From the point of view of the federal budget, both decisions cost \$1 dollar. The first is a direct expenditure and the second is a tax expenditure. But aside from having different names, they are the same.

Now consider the home mortgage interest deduction, a tax expenditure that costs the federal treasury approximately \$130 billion per year. According to the Atlantic, 75 percent of this tax expenditure is given to the top 20 percent of income earners. What this means is that the federal government spends almost \$100 billion per year subsidizing large homes for upper middle class and wealthy people. Middle-class people get a tiny piece of this pie. Poor people get nothing.

But where does the government get \$100 billion to pay for this tax expenditure for the rich? From mostly-poor renters of course, in other words tax payers who receive zero mortgage interest deduction. The home mortgage interest deduction is simply a transfer of wealth from mostly poor renters to mostly well-off home-owners.

And that isn't an isolated program, as Republicans have been gaming the tax system for years to enable just such maneuvers. One of Ronald Reagan's great successes entailed cutting marginal tax rates on the rich, and then using social security taxes, which are paid disproportionately by low and middle-income earners, to subsidize the budget hole caused by his tax breaks for the wealthy.

So when Governor Romney said that 47 percent of Americans are irresponsible and simply want handouts, he was tapping into and in fact reinforcing the public's ignorance of the federal tax system as a cash cow that transfers a lot more money from the poor to the rich than the other way around. To frame poor people who require health care as free-riders while giving a free pass to rich people who demand tax cuts (tax expenditures) is a sleight of hand. I wonder if Romney understands the deception or not.

When Clint Eastwood famously addressed an empty chair at the Republican National Convention, Jon Stewart observed that the Republicans have been running against an Obama who only they can see (Muslim, foreign-born, socialist, etc) and who is invisible to the rest of America. According to Stewart, Eastwood literalized that dynamic by addressing an invisible Obama. But as Romney's comments about the 47 percent illustrate, the Republican predilection for distortion and projection extends beyond Obama, and includes a make-believe fantasy about the government's role in the redistribution of wealth.

If Republicans were honest about the way government works, they might realize that government helps everyone, and that the debate we should be having is not about moochers versus earners, but about what distribution of government support can minimize suffering and promote the public welfare.

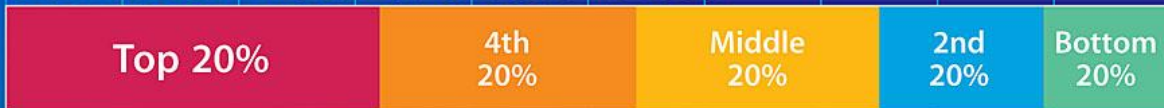
U.S. Wealth Distribution: Perception vs Reality

- Top 20% ■
- (next to highest) 4th 20% ■
- Middle 20% ■
- (next to lowest) 2nd 20% ■
- Bottom 20% ■

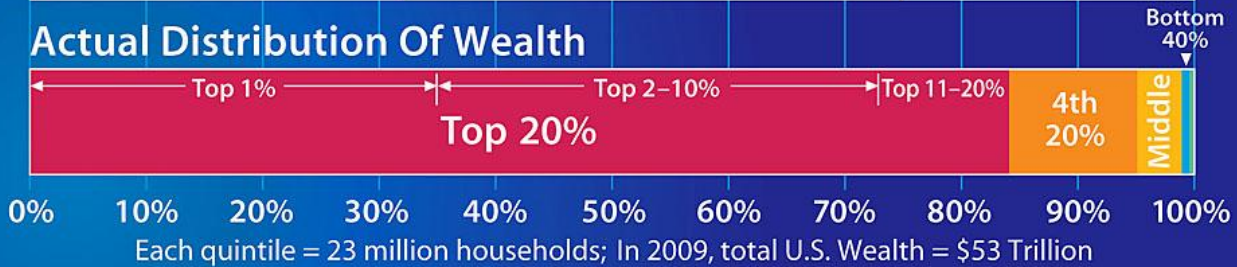
What Americans Think The Distribution Is



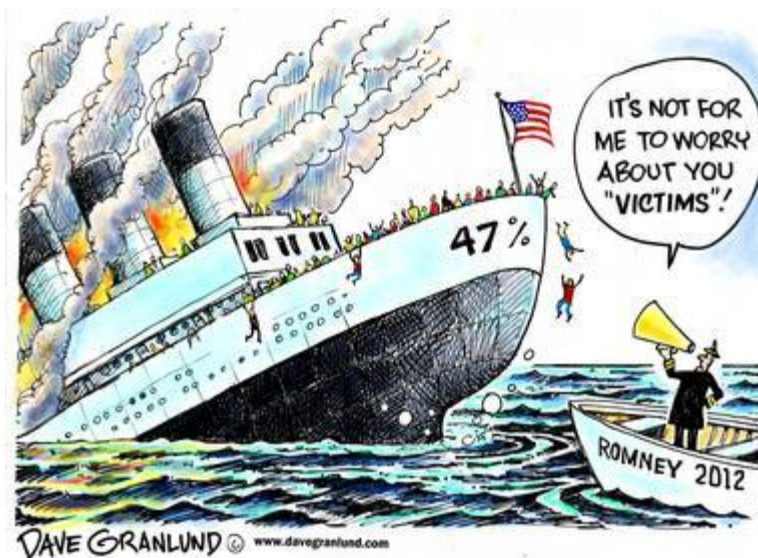
Distribution That 92% Choose As Ideal



Actual Distribution Of Wealth



Source: Survey of 5,000 Americans at all income levels by Michael Norton, Harvard Business School & Dan Ariely, Duke University
 Graph info appeared in "It's the Inequality, Stupid" *Mother Jones*, March/April 2011 (www.MotherJones.com)
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20120919-02	11:19	Pam	Re: The GOP's Bleak Future (reply to SteveB, FotM Newsletter #229)
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I love Shrum's analysis of the Republican party in today's FotM. It sounds about right to me. It also reminds me that I actually am a centrist, though I proudly wear the label "liberal." GHW and Jeb Bush I can take; Eric Cantor and Rick Santorum, no. I've always thought of being in the middle as a sort of weasel position, neither one thing nor the other. This article made me change my mind. What I don't like are extremes, whether it be the Weathermen and the Black Panthers or the Tea Party and Pat Robertson followers. My Republican friend and I can be friends of 25 years because neither of us likes extremes. The Left drives her crazy; I just dismiss them. The Right makes me nuts; I think she just dismisses them too. These leanings reveal our personalities, and I think this is true of everyone. I worry about the state of the world; she worries about whether people like her. I care if people like me, but I don't go against my own grain to curry favor. She does care, and is often surprised when people behave better than she expected. She was sure that when she got divorced, her friends would turn on her. I knew they wouldn't. She worried about my reunion with David; I didn't. We have both had successes and failures that stem from these deep personality traits. My point is, I think most voters (people) are directed by an inner voice they aren't even aware is speaking to them. Many attribute their ways of thinking to parents and upbringing, but I think it goes even deeper than that. It may be a genetic thing that pulls the DNA from some

remote great-uncle, which may make an individual seem like an alien in his nuclear family, or it may be something else. I find this fascinating, and I'm not sure how to apply it to the larger political scene; maybe one of you can.

20120919-03	12:35	SteveB	"The Real Mitt Revealed"
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"The Real Mitt Revealed" by Robert Reich, NationofChange

Sept. 19, 2012, (<http://www.nationofchange.org/real-mitt-revealed-1348063289>)

(Some of us thought Romney was without core or principle, an empty suit that would say anything to be elected.)

First are the distortions. Romney says 47 percent of Americans don't pay income taxes. That's literally true, except it's misleading because it includes every retiree who hasn't enough income to pay income taxes (most retirees), every poor and lower-income person who doesn't have enough income to pay, and a few multi-millionaires (perhaps like Romney himself — we don't know because he won't release his tax returns), who don't pay because of tax loopholes and tax-avoidance schemes. Moreover, just about all working Americans, regardless of income, pay federal payroll taxes. Everyone pays state and local sales taxes. And so on.

Romney also distorts reality by purposely mixing "entitlements" with "a sense of entitlement," and lumps in all recipients of Social Security, Medicare, and unemployment benefits into his 47 percent. Even though these programs are considered "entitlement" spending, their recipients are not undeserving; they don't consider themselves entitled to handouts. They've paid into these insurance plans through their payroll taxes.

But the the most important revelation here isn't Romney's witting distortions. It's his indignant condemnation of almost half the American electorate. A president is supposed to represent all of America, not just the 51 percent who elect him, and have a modicum of sympathy for the less fortunate among us.

Yet here is the real Mitt Romney — a fabulously wealthy financier, presumably speaking to other wealthy people (note the waiters scurrying about), with a passion we haven't before seen in him — saying it isn't his "job" to worry about Americans who he describes as "irresponsible," who fail to take care of themselves, and whose neediness is presumably their own fault.

Some of us thought Romney was without core or principle, an empty suit that would say anything to be elected. But here, evidently, is the real Mitt — a man whose core principle is clearly on display, and articulated with deep conviction: social Darwinism — survival of the richest, the hell with those who need a helping hand.

In a subsequent news conference he attempted to make it sound as if he was talking here about political strategy, not social conviction. Watch and see for yourself.

20120919-04	13:15	MarthaH	"Jimmy Carter's Grandson Arranged Romney Video Release"
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Touché, Mittens!

"Jimmy Carter's Grandson Arranged Romney Video Release" by AP/USA Today

(WASHINGTON) Midway through a routine Internet search, James Carter IV stumbled upon a video that just didn't seem right.

The grandson of former President Jimmy Carter and a self-fashioned Democratic opposition researcher, the younger Carter had watched countless hours of footage of Republican Mitt Romney and made it a habit to search YouTube every few days for keywords like "Romney" and "Republicans."

But on this day in August, one clip jumped out. There was Romney, in an undisclosed location, bluntly discussing a visit to a Chinese factory with substandard conditions.

"The hidden camera video -- it was all blurred out at the beginning, and it was mysterious," Carter said. "It piqued my interest."

Something told him there might be more there than the brief clip posted on the YouTube channel "Anne Onymous." Although not affiliated with any campaign or super PAC, Carter had made it a personal mission to help get Democrats elected in 2012 -- and to do his part to push back against Romney's relentless campaign-trail mockery of his grandfather.

So Carter, 35, of Atlanta, set out to track down the source of the video. He sent a message to the YouTube user seeking details. No luck. But then, after sharing links to the video on Twitter, Carter realized he had a new follower with the same name as the YouTube account. He quickly shot off a direct message.

"They were wary at first," Carter said in an interview with the Associated Press. "But they did respond."

What followed was a delicate, concerted effort to convince the source -- still unknown to the public -- that Carter could be trusted, and that the world had to see the rest of what was surreptitiously recorded as Romney spoke in May to donors who had paid \$50,000 a person to attend the private fundraiser.

In a string of Internet conversations, Carter showed the source evidence that he had helped David Corn, a journalist with the magazine *Mother Jones*, report a story about Global-Tech Appliances, a Chinese firm that Romney's Bain Capital briefly invested in. Both Carter and the source suspected it was that firm's factory that Romney was speaking about in the video.

"That gave me credibility," Carter said. "They opened up to me a little bit."

Soon after, Carter persuaded the source to trust Corn with the full video -- on the condition that he keep the source's identity a secret. Corn ran with it, using clues in the video to triangulate when and where it had been recorded.

Then on Monday and Tuesday, Corn posted the clips to his magazine's website, sparking a firestorm for the Romney campaign over remarks claiming that nearly half of Americans "believe they are victims" deserving government help and that the Palestinians have no interest in peace with Israel.

"James: This is extraordinary. Congratulations! Papa," the former president told his grandson Tuesday morning in an e-mail obtained by the AP.

For Carter, whose Twitter profile notes he's looking for work, his success in unearthing the video was followed by a string of job offers Tuesday, from the Ohio Democratic Party to online news sites like The Huffington Post and ThinkProgress.

But the coup de grace for Carter is the irony that Romney has spent many months assailing the elder Carter's record on everything from foreign affairs to small-business policy, hoping to saddle the incumbent president with the less popular vestiges of his Democratic predecessor.

"I've gotten a lot of Twitter messages from people supporting me and saying that it's poetic justice that it was a Carter that uncovered this, considering the way that the Romney campaign has been talking about my grandfather," Carter said. "I agree with that sentiment wholeheartedly."

Video: Carter's grandson found Romney's '47%' remarks: <http://www.usatoday.com/video/news/1848515362001>.

20120919-05

13:39

Pam

Re: "Jimmy Carter's Grandson Arranged Romney Video Release" (reply to MarthaH, above)

I love this!! The Teabaggers are going to have to twist themselves into pretzels to get out of this one.

20120919-07	14:18	SteveB	Re: "Jimmy Carter's Grandson Arranged Romney Video Release" (reply to MarthaH, above)
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There is such a thing as poetic justice! I love it!

20120919-08	15:31	SandyI	Re: "Jimmy Carter's Grandson Arranged Romney Video Release" (reply to MarthaH, above)
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Just read this and I love it. I so admire Jimmy and Rosalynn Carter and all they have done to have fair elections around the world and to eradicate Guinea Worm and other horrific diseases. They live their beliefs and vindicate the poor treatment given them while in the White House and after. Poetic justice strikes again.

[Not to mention their work with Habitat for Humanity and the people of Haiti and Africa. A great man and couple. – SteveB]

20120919-18	19:51	MarthaH	"Fallacies of Romney's Logic"
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Yep and amen!

"Fallacies of Romney's Logic" by Joseph Stiglitz, *USA Today*

Sept. 19, 2012, (<http://www.usatoday.com/news/opinion/forum/story/2012-09-18/joseph-stiglitz-romney-tax/57803446/1>)

Mitt Romney's acerbic attack against the 47% of Americans who allegedly don't pay income taxes and are dependent on government has rightly given rise to a storm. It suggests that large numbers —Barack Obama's supporters — are freeloaders.

The irony is that it is people such as Romney, who are freeloading: The taxes that he has said he is paying (as a percentage of his reported income) are far less than those with substantially less income. And contrary to what some of them would like to believe, no one makes it on his own. Even if they don't inherit their wealth, success in business requires a rule of law, an educated workforce, a public infrastructure, all of which are provided by government.

Even "innovators" such as Google have done what they did only by building on the work of others . Before Google could create the Internet's most popular search engine, someone had to create the Internet — and it was government that did that.

But the fallacies in Romney's logic run deeper.

First, even those who don't pay income taxes pay a host of other taxes, including payroll, sales, excise and property taxes. Many of those receiving "benefits" paid for them —through Social Security and Medicare contributions. They're not free riders. Government has done a better job providing these benefits than the private sector. Let's remember why these programs were started: The private sector left most elderly bereft of support, the market for annuities essentially didn't exist, and the elderly couldn't get health insurance.

Even today, the private sector doesn't provide the kind of security that Social Security provides — including protection against market volatility and inflation. And transaction costs of the Social Security Administration are

markedly lower than those in the private sector — not a surprise, since their objective is to maximize these costs. Transaction costs are their profits.

Secondly, many of those receiving benefits are our young — providing them education and health (even if they or their parents don't pay taxes) are investments in our future. America is the country with the least equality of opportunity of any of the advanced countries for which there is data. A child's life prospects are more dependent on the income and education of his parents than in these other countries. While the American Dream may have become a myth, it doesn't have to be that way. Children shouldn't have to depend on the wealth of their parents to get the education or health care they need to live up to their potential.

Thirdly, an efficient system of social protection is an important part of any modern society — necessary to enable individuals to take risks. Again, the market failed to provide adequate insurance; for instance, for unemployment or disability. That's why the government stepped in. Those receiving those benefits typically paid for them, either directly or indirectly, through contributions they or their employer made on their behalf to these insurance funds. But providing social protection against these risks too can make for a more productive society. Individuals can take on more high-return, high-risk activities if they know there is a safety net protecting them if things don't work out. It's one of the reasons that some economies with better social protection have been growing much more rapidly than the United States, even during the recent recession.

Fourthly, many of those at the bottom — who have become so dependent on government — are there partly because government has failed in one way or the other. It has failed to provide them with skills that would make them productive, so they could earn an adequate living. It has failed to stop banks from taking advantage of them through predatory lending and abusive credit card practices. It has failed to stop for-profit schools from taking advantage of their aspirations to move up in the world through education.

Finally, we are a community — and all communities help those who are less fortunate among them. If our economic system results in so many without jobs, dependent on the government for food, then government has to step in. Our economic system has not worked in the way it should: It has not created jobs for all those who would like to work. Many of the jobs that have been created do not pay a livable wage.

We do have a divided society. But it is not divided, as Romney has suggested, between those who are free loaders and the rest, even if some of those who are paying taxes are not paying their fair share, and are free riding on those who do.

Rather, it is divided between those who see America as a community, and who recognize that the only way to have sustained prosperity is to have shared prosperity, and those who don't.

[20120919-22](#) 20:03 Pam Re: "Fallacies of Romney's Logic" (reply to MarthaH, above)

This is great. I love Stiglitz. I find it hard to believe America could undo all the progress we have made in the past 60 years, but it's scary that so many are trying to do just that. Eric Cantor is frightening.

[20120919-06](#) 14:11 Ben Photo: Today's Lunch at Apple

Today's delicious cafeteria fare was Seared Black Drum from the Texas Gulf. Impeccably seared in coconut butter, my generous filet had a crisp, tasty pellicle tender enough to be dissected with chopsticks. It will be little surprise to learn that the fish inside was perfectly cooked, perfectly moist, perfectly flaky, and delicately sweet and flavorful in its own right. Chef Alejandro's Asian line always addresses fish as art. In a fit of bravery, I determined to attack my meal with chopsticks, leaving flatware at the counter.

No problem. A bit of poking with the skin was required, but the fish itself might have been made for chopstick consumption. The bright orange sauce was sweet and spicy (wonderful!) with rich flavors of kaffir lime, chilis, lemongrass, and ginger, and was unexpectedly tasty with the mild fish. Typically, I expect a delicate flavor with something as mild and subtle as fresh fish, but this aromatic stuff was delicious in combination with the drum. The

white Nishiki sticky-rice picked up a good bit of it, too, without losing its stickable integrity. Today's 'lemonade' (a glass of lemonade a day is prescribed by my urologist to minimize kidney stones) was Watermelon Lemonade, which has appeared before, but this was more potent than usual, almost as if the watermelon component was a reduction, and it was zingy, almost as though a drop of camphor had been added. (Really!)



Seared Gulf Black Drum over Nishiki White Rice

[20120919-09](#) 15:48 SteveG "Ten Huge Issues Being Ignored in the Presidential Campaign"

These are true...

"Ten Huge Issues Being Ignored in the Presidential Campaign" by Zack Beauchamp, Think Progress/NationofChange

Sept. 19, 2012, (<http://www.nationofchange.org/ten-huge-issues-being-ignored-presidential-campaign-1348067863>)

The media focus on political minutiae in the presidential campaign can often crowd out the substantive issues that the winner will have to deal with once taking office. And while the candidates themselves occasionally talk about these issues, there's a number of critical concerns that get no attention, including some of the worst problems (in terms of the harm they cause to people's lives) in the United States and the world. To address this lamentable state of affairs, ThinkProgress has compiled a list of eight of the most significant problems being severely underserved by the campaign and American political discourse more broadly. In no particular order:

MASS INCARCERATION AND THE DRUG WAR

Writing in the *New Yorker*, Adam Gopnik termed "mass incarceration on a scale almost unexampled in human history...perhaps the fundamental fact [of American society], as slavery was the fundamental fact of 1850." Indeed, as Gopnik notes, there are more black men in prison today than were enslaved then and more total people in prison than there were in Stalin's gulags at their largest. The result of this wave of imprisonment was structural

inequality so severe that it was called "the new Jim Crow" by a famous book of the same title, as the strict limitations placed on convicted felons have rendered millions black Americans second-class citizens. One of the principal causes of the rise of mass incarceration is the War on Drugs, which has failed abysmally at limiting the use of dangerous drugs but succeeded wildly at aiding and abetting racial inequality in the United States and the murderous drug trade abroad. The Justice Department recently doubled down on these policies by initiating a massive crackdown on medical marijuana in states that have legalized the drug's medicinal use.

THE HOUSING MARKET

Though it's well-known that the housing bubble collapse precipitated the financial collapse, the subsequent woes of the housing market have received comparatively little attention. John Griffith, Julia Gordon, and David Sanchez, in a recent report for the Center for American Progress, call the current housing market "one of the biggest drags on our recovery," writing that "The historic decline in home prices since 2006 has cost Americans more than \$7 trillion in household wealth, forced millions of families out of their homes, and left nearly one in four homeowners owing more on their mortgages than their homes are worth. Private investment in housing is a fraction of its historic norm, translating to billions in lost economic output and millions of missing jobs. And more than five years into the crisis, the U.S. mortgage market remains on life support as the federal government guaranteed more than 95 percent of home loans made last year."

THE INDIA/PAKISTAN CONFLICT

As the United States exits Afghanistan, tensions are likely to flare up again between the two nuclear-armed states over concerns about terrorism and relative influence in the country. The status of the contested Jammu-Kashmir province also remains unresolved. Former Pakistani director of Arms Control and Disarmament Affairs, Feroz Hassan Khan, concluded in a paper published by the US Army War College that "this region seems to be the one place in the world most likely to suffer nuclear warfare due to the seemingly undiminished national, religious, and ethnic animosities between these two countries."

OVERFISHING

Fish stocks have been in free-fall since 1989, and the reason for that is clear: humans are killing fish so quickly that "large ocean fish" stocks have been reduced to ten percent of their pre-industrial peak. This pace, which could destroy every fishery in the world by 2048, isn't just of interest to animal rights activists, as the fishing industry plays a critical role in both feeding the world's poor and the American economy. Marine ecologist Daniel Pauly goes further, worrying that the effects of the "end of fish" on the ocean ecosystem could imperil its stability altogether, undermining one of the central bases of life on earth.

INTERNET PRIVACY

We routinely put our vital information online without thinking, but it's becoming increasingly unclear that such information is protected from government and corporate spying. As products like Facebook become essential services, tech companies are employing shady privacy and security procedures that make it very easy for data to be leaked to third-party sources without your consent. Moreover, FBI and similar government agents can gain access to private electronic information through national security surveillance powers.

AMERICA'S SECURITY STATE AND SHADOW WARS

Though Guantanamo Bay, the PATRIOT Act, and warrantless wiretapping were thought to be vestiges of the Bush Administration in 2009, the Obama Administration hasn't rolled them back, threatening to make the supposedly emergency-only national security state a permanent institution. In recent years, the the security state at home has been supplemented by an escalating shadow war against terrorist organizations in several countries around the world, waged principally by Special Forces and a secretive drone program. These stepped-up counterterrorism policies may be weakening al-Qaeda and associated movements, but it's not clear if the potential costs in terms of privacy violations, blowback, and deaths of innocent civilians are well understood, let alone worth it.

FACTORY FARMING

Several billion animals live and get killed on factory farms, concentrated animal-raising plants where sentient creatures are forced to live their entire lives in tiny, often poorly maintained pens. The treatment of the pigs, cows, and chickens on factory farms is horrific — the pens are so tight that animals develop sores, the stress of confinement produces psychiatric disorders that result in self-harming behaviors like gnawing on metal bars, and proprietors conduct painful, medically unnecessary tail amputations simply because they want to. Factory farming also hurts humans; the “farms” are ideal breeding grounds for infectious diseases and do serious damage to the local and global environment.

SEGREGATION BY RACE AND CLASS IN EDUCATION

Despite *Brown v. Board of Education*, there is a pronounced trend toward resegregation by race and class in American schools. Poor students, especially black and Latino ones, are being shunted into a separate-but-unequal school system while wealthy students attend parallel, superior institutions. The effect of this, as Chris Hayes documents in his book *Twilight of the Elites*, is to create a self-perpetuating class cycle where the wealthy use their advantage to secure that their children get access to the best possible schooling, making it significantly easier for said children to become wealthy and successful and do the same for their kids. The less well off, by contrast, have only very limited ability to break into the upper echelons of American society through education, helping to cement broader trends toward inequality in the United States.

[20120919-10](#) 16:22 SteveG "G.O.P. Blocks Veteran Jobs Bill"

"G.O.P. Blocks Veteran Jobs Bill" by Lawrence Downes, *New York Times*

Sept. 19, 2012, (<http://takingnote.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/09/19/g-o-p-blocks-veteran-jobs-bill/?smid=tw-share>)

Veterans won't be getting a new, billion-dollar jobs program, not from this Senate. Republicans on Wednesday afternoon blocked a vote on the Veterans Job Corps Bill after Jeff Sessions of Alabama raised a point of order — he said the bill violated a cap on spending agreed to by Congress last year. The bill's sponsor, Patty Murray of Washington, said that shouldn't matter, since the bill's cost was fully offset by new revenues. She said Mr. Sessions and his party colleagues had been furiously generating excuses to oppose the bill, and were now exploiting a technicality to deny thousands of veterans a shot at getting hired as police officers, firefighters and parks workers, among other things.

The vote was 58-40; the bill needed 60 votes to proceed.

It would be easier to admire the Republicans' late-breaking fiscal scrupulosity if their motives — denying the Obama administration any kind of victory this year, whatever the cost to jobless vets — weren't so transparent. It's probably useful to remind Republicans like John McCain (a “nay” on the jobs bill) that wounded, jobless and homeless veterans aren't a fact of nature. They're a product of the wars that Congress members voted for, the war debt they piled on, and the economy they helped ruin.

“It's unbelievable that even after more than a decade of war, many Republicans still will not acknowledge that the treatment of our veterans is a cost of war,” Ms. Murray said in a statement after the vote.

[20120919-11](#) 16:27 Art Re: "G.O.P. Blocks Veteran Jobs Bill" (reply to SteveG, above)

It's called "screw the troops". When we say Defense we mean contracts for Lockheed Martin. GD etc.

[20120919-13](#) 16:39 Pam Re: "G.O.P. Blocks Veteran Jobs Bill" (reply to SteveG, above)

This makes me want to choke a Republican!

[20120919-15](#) 16:44 SteveG Re: "G.O.P. Blocks Veteran Jobs Bill" (reply to Pam, above)

Disgraceful!

[20120919-14](#) 16:43 Pam Re: "G.O.P. Blocks Veteran Jobs Bill" (reply to Art, above)

Exactly.

Art, what are your thoughts on the Israel/Iran contretemps?

[20120919-17](#) 19:38 Art Re: Israel & Iran (reply to Pam, above)

Mostly stupid. Short of using a Nuke, I do not see how Israel can significantly slow down the Iranian movement to develop some sort of nuclear program. It is not just one above ground facility easy to reach and to hit. If they did try something the Hezbollah in Lebanon will fire every rocket they have, and they have a lot. Egypt is no longer constrained and while Syria may be distracted just now, neither side has any love for the Israelis. Finally if a first strike does not work, Israel will have the wrath of every other nation in the region to deal with.

As for us, the last thing we need is another war in the ME. Bottom line is Iran may well get a Nuc. We'll just have to learn to live with it. Pakistan has Nukes now. If later Iran did try to hit Israel with a Nuke, Iran will become a glassed over desert with no one left alive. They know that.

So, while Netanyahu (Sp) keeps trying to push us into some sort of "no turn back" scenario, this Administration is wisely telling him to go fly a kite. I don't think most Israelis support a first strike either.

[20120919-20](#) 19:58 SteveG Re: Israel & Iran (reply to Art, above)

Heard an interview over the weekend that Iran has a dozen or so sights with nuclear capabilities and that to bomb all would be next to impossible and would cause about 50,000 rockets to be headed in the direction of Israel. Did read an article today talking about in August of this year there were 2 explosions of electrical power plants in Iran knocking out the centrifuges at 2 places. All I have heard/read supports Art's writing, but he does it better.

[20120919-19](#) 19:57 Pam Re: Israel & Iran (reply to Art, above)

What is it with Netanyahu? His whole cabinet, military, and intelligence service are against a pre-emptive strike. I'm not thrilled about Iran having nuclear weapons, but, as you say, there may be nothing we can do about it. Surely the Iranians don't have a death wish. I heard someone recently (for the life of me I can't remember who) say that during the Cold War, the Soviets and the Americans had some control over their client states and could start and stop wars pretty much as they saw fit. There was a balance of power that doesn't really exist today. I'd never thought about it that way before. Now, all these "little" countries are free to do whatever they want. This may be a simplistic way of putting it, but it was something along those lines. It seems like our greatest threat is lone wolves, like Netanyahu, who want to do everything their way, no matter what. Romney strikes me as another one of those, but I can't imagine he can possibly be elected. Not now.

[20120919-21](#) 20:02 SteveG Re: Israel & Iran (reply to Pam, above)

Our taking Iraq out has basically shifted the balance of power in the middle east and has let Iran get to the position they are in. The Arab spring has also thrown the balance of power out of whack – Art will know more and better than I do.

[20120919-23](#) 20:08 Pam Re: Israel & Iran (reply to SteveG, above)

Yeah. The Middle East was troublesome before, but isn't it worse now? I wonder who did that?

[20120919-24](#) 20:16 SteveB Re: Israel & Iran (reply to Pam, above)

Don't you mean, "Who 'built' that"?

Pam, quit trying to blame everything on Mr. Obama!

[20120919-25](#) 20:28 Pam Re: Israel & Iran (reply to SteveB, above)

LOL

[20120919-01](#) 10:43 SteveB Great College Courses for Free

<https://www.coursera.org/>

[20120919-12](#) 16:30 Art "A Digital Tool to Unlock Learning"

"A Digital Tool to Unlock Learning" by David Bornstein, *New York Times*

Sept 19, 2012, (<http://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/09/19/a-digital-tool-to-unlock-learning/>)

(Solutions to social problems and why they work.)

When we think about education reform, we usually focus on teacher quality. The big battleground in education revolves around holding teachers accountable for their performance. With all the focus on teachers, however, one group that is often forgotten as a key learning resource are the students themselves.

One way to help students gain agency over their own education is through technology. Despite the Internet revolution, the field of K-12 education has been relatively slow to respond to digital media. That's why I paid a visit last week to the site of a promising experiment in digital learning in New York: the Bea Fuller Rodgers Middle School in Washington Heights.

Last year, CFY, a nonprofit organization, provided home computers (and arranged for discounted broadband access) to every one of the sixth grade students in the school. (Almost all the school's families are Hispanics who qualify for the federal government's free or reduced lunch program. Currently, half of all Hispanics in the United States lack broadband.)

In addition, CFY provided a four-hour training for the students and their parents in a free Web-based platform CFY developed called PowerMyLearning which contains 1,000 (soon to be 2,800) digital learning activities and games from across the Web that have been carefully selected and categorized by teachers and education specialists. Finally, CFY provided onsite training to the school's sixth grade teachers in how to integrate PowerMyLearning into their classrooms (practicing what educators call "blended learning.")

Despite a November start, the program appears to have made a big difference especially for struggling students. The school reports that the percentage of last year's sixth graders with learning disabilities who met or exceeded standards in math (testing at level 3 or 4) increased by 36 percent, while the percentage of students who had been below standard (testing at level 1) decreased from 23 percent to zero.

These results are striking, but they have to be put into context. Bea Fuller Rodgers is a small school with about 20 teachers. It has a dynamic principal, Kristy De la Cruz, and some very caring and committed teachers. So it's too early to draw conclusions from the results. But what caught my attention was simply how excited and effusive everyone was, including the students, about PowerMyLearning.

All of the teachers I spoke with admitted that they had had reservations when the platform was introduced to them. Tristan Wright, a veteran teacher who teaches struggling students, had been wary of technology until she tried out the platform one weekend with her 9-year-old daughter. Daniel Matta, a six year veteran who teaches math, said his first reaction was: "Oh, no, not another thing. It won't work."

Now they both say that the digital learning not only increases student attention and engagement in school — a finding that conforms with research (pdf, p. 37-42) — but has also encouraged students to take ownership of their own learning and made it easier for teachers to differentiate instruction without embarrassing students. "After 12 years, it's completely changed my experience as a teacher," said Wright.

PowerMyLearning has hundreds of activities for each grade level that are linked to the Common Core State Standards (which have been adopted by 45 states). Teachers assign "playlists" of activities to students based on student needs; they can track what the students do at school and home. They also share data from performance tests with students so they can guide their own learning as needed. (In the fall, parents will also be able to create playlists.)

"We've found that the students want to know the reality," explained the principal, Kristy De la Cruz. "They know when they're struggling and they want to know how to work on it. This blanket assumption that 'I'm dumb in math' has changed to 'I need to practice fractions.'"

That's exactly what Maria de Leon, a seventh grade student, did in partnership with her teacher. "I created my own playlist," she said. "Five activities for math and five for reading. Based on things that I needed help with."

One of the biggest challenges teachers face is creating environments in which children feel safe to try out ideas. When children are asked questions in class, it's inherently stressful — like being on stage. When you learn from a person you're always conscious that that person is thinking about you. In his classic book, "How Children Fail," John Holt noted that, unlike toddlers who are undaunted experimenters, many children in grade school become more concerned with avoiding embarrassment than learning new things.

After years of embarrassments or failures, some children grow so guarded they won't even make eye contact with teachers. That was a problem that Tristan Wright faced with one of her eighth grade students, who resisted her efforts to connect. Then, one day earlier this year, she handed him a laptop opened to a math game that dealt with the concept of slope. "The next thing, he was doing it," she told me. "And then he started asking questions. He showed up to my next session and we agreed that he could continue working with the computer. He still struggles with effort, but it opened up a door. It changed our whole relationship."

Another challenge for teachers like Wright is differentiating instruction for students at different levels without stigmatizing them. Today, schools are being required to serve children with wide ranges of abilities and special needs. The old way of differentiating instruction was to separate kids in groups or classes and assign different exercises. No matter how the labels were disguised — you could call one group the Eagles and the other the Falcons — the kids knew the difference.

Technology offers another path. For example, Wright had an eighth grader who had trouble with basic addition. "I could never go to her and say, 'Today we're going to work on adding.' It would just be devastating to her," she said. "With PowerMyLearning, I found I could assign her activities and she didn't even know what skills she was working on. She was just playing. And for the first time, she started to like math."

"People aren't going to believe me when I say this," she added. "But when the kids are using technology, they don't care what other kids are doing. They're just focused on the activity." The students are less self-conscious, so they try more experiments. If an answer is wrong, the computer gives feedback, and they can adjust — quite a different experience from saying the wrong answer out loud. Technology offers students different ways to visualize

information. And students can continue working at home. "Sometimes the teacher doesn't explain it to you as well as a computer," added Lisa Lora, a seventh grade student. "And there are no interruptions. No one is shouting answers. You can concentrate and go at your own pace."

Often, the students work in groups, rotating from station to station. As students figure things out they'll show their partners. "They don't even realize they're teaching each other," said Wright. "It just comes out organically."

CFY was founded by Elisabeth Stock in 1999, when Google was a year old, Internet access was dial-up, and the "digital divide" was emerging as a serious educational problem. The organization began by concentrating on helping low-income students do better in school by improving their learning environment at home. Since then, the organization has provided home computers and training to kids and parents in 50,000 families in five cities. An independent study (pdf) in 2007 reported that its approach led to significant increases in students' math scores. In recent years, the organization has moved to deepen its work in the classroom.

Stock, a social entrepreneur and an engineer with degrees from M.I.T., decided to target sixth grade because research indicated that it is a pivotal year in a child's development. "It's the age where children are starting to push away from their parents but also they're still young enough that when you say, 'You did a great job on your test, they blush,'" she explained. "It's the age where school becomes more rigorous and if kids fall behind, it's a predictor of them dropping out."

De la Cruz said that because a parent or guardian in each family receives training in PowerMyLearning at the beginning of the school year, it leads to more conversations about education at home. Kids and parents play games together. A survey three months after the start of the program found that average television watching had declined an hour a day. "The parents are very aware that their children love technology and use it every day," said De la Cruz. "And they want to know how their children are using it and how to support it."

Over the past decade, this need has grown more pressing as a new gap has opened up: the "time wasting" gap. As technology and broadband continue to spread, and educational software products proliferate, not enough effort has gone into packaging and delivering free high quality online learning activities that teachers, parents and students from low-income or low-education backgrounds find accessible and engaging.

That means activities that children can use for different learning issues without direct adult support, that work for different learning styles (e.g., games, visualizations and simulations, not just videos), material that is accurate and teaches concepts, that is adaptive, that supports group learning and children with special language needs, and doesn't assume that families have up to date computers. Those were some of the requirements for PowerMyLearning when it was launched in 2010. "We wanted to build something that was flexible, that teachers at different levels of comfort and expertise could take advantage of, that treated them as professionals, and at the same time was really engaging for the students," said Stock.

This year, the Gates, Broad and Kellogg foundations invested \$7 million to build up and spread the platform so that it can be used by schools across the country. CFY will be expanding its intensive school partnership program to eight or nine schools this year and will be reducing its costs per school so that the program can be scaled further. In the meantime, any student, parent or teacher can use PowerMyLearning for free.

"I used to think I would fail math," said Juan Guzmán, a seventh grade student, who loves playing a baseball math game. "Sometimes teachers would go too fast for me. But I like PowerMyLearning because I can take a break if I get tired."

"The main thing is that it feels like I'm not in school," he added. "I'm just playing a game. But then when I finish I realize that I learned something. It's weird."

"Yeah," added Maria de Leon: "I never thought that fun could go with learning."

[20120919-16](#) 16:53 Pam Re: "A Digital Tool to Unlock Learning" (reply to Art, above)

This is great. Mark's Stanford alumni magazine came yesterday, and it has an article about how Stanford is getting into online learning in a big way. We really are in the midst of huge change. I think it's pretty exciting.

[20120919-26](#) 23:58 Marci Photo: '...the Mother of Invention' #6



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Steven W. Baker (SteveB), Editor/Moderator

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