

Reflections on “Insanity”, “Societal Psychosis” and “Irrational Violence” in America

By [Jim Miles](#)

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Region: [USA](#)
Theme: [History](#)

I thought I knew what it meant, but I looked up the definition of insanity anyway: mentally deranged, not of sound mind; irrational [Concise Oxford Dictionary]. That is a rather broad spectrum and on more reflection includes not only Trump and his minions, but everyone else of us at least one time or another – including myself.

Irrational

How often in an argument do you hear the rhetorical question, “Are you insane?”, referring to any number of topics within human endeavors. If “irrational” is the means by which most of us are to be judged sane or insane, then yes, we are insane due to irrational behaviour probably on a daily basis.

The reasoning is complicated by our own self definition as being homo sapiens (“wise man”), an anthropomorphic self aggrandizing, ego centered definition. Going deeper into complications, our genetic heritage often times rewards actions that to a ‘civilized’ and ‘cultured’ homo sapien is intellectually offensive but carries great genetic weight. Gene survival does not care much about philosophies of this or that, the gene is selfish and simply wants to be reproduced.

Given our ability to “rationalize” our own positions on different actions and ideas, anything else can be considered irrational while our own ideas assume (presume) the proper explanation, the supposedly logical explanation, as rational. But we are fully capable of ignoring ideas – indeed reality – in order to allow our internal rationalizations to fit into – mostly – whatever our current lifestyle values are.

Examples species wide

A lot of what homo sapiens do is irrational but is so much ingrained into our upbringing, our culture that it is almost not evident to many, it is just normal, and that normal is used to then define or place parameters around what is irrational or rational, sane or insane. Our daily lives are filled with ‘normal’, but strictly speaking, irrational actions.

Living in debt is one example. Yes, in our society debt is normal and is indeed promoted and we all use credit cards or carry loans of one kind or another. The result is to make the rich richer and the rest of us paying their bills (in basic terms). But as a society as a whole we (the western world specifically, but also including China as our main economic Asian partner) are many trillions of dollars in debt – with possible quadrillions according to some – in strange derivative financialized devices that simply breed more money and power to the bankers and money changers.

On a more personal level, U.S. student debt is somewhere around 1.2 trillion dollars, about the same as the known military budget, itself the largest by far in the world. Auto debt matches that while overall personal debt (these loans plus credit cards plus mortgages) comes in over 13 trillion (2017, Investopedia). On top of this again is government debt of over 22 trillion which can only be paid off with hyperinflation or destroyed in a major recession/depression.

Violence - rational or irrational

Homo sapiens have always used violence in order to maintain the species, it is pretty much a built in biological imperative. However, if we are supposedly truly sapient, and our rational brains are truly rational and not used just for 'rationalizing' a preset disposition or belief, then certainly we should be able to overcome these tendencies. Given also that we are overpopulating the planet and overconsuming it the biological imperative for more of us, for more people, more growth, lessens considerably - we need to recognize our limits and realize that our own biology is working against us.

Perhaps that would not be so bad if we were not so technologically capable (again by our own definition) having created an array of weapons that enable mass killings from what we have recently witnessed in the U.S. - or done by the U.S. elsewhere - to the potential of simply eliminating the whole species and most of the rest of the living world as a result of a nuclear war.

Rational? Some in the U.S. believe so - Trump seems to think starting a nuclear war is okay; his infamous sidekick Bolton is all for nuking other countries that do not fall into line with U.S. policy demands, Iran in particular; Pompeo and his born again evangelical peers would be quite happy to have a nuclear war as a sign of the end times and his personal rapture, his 'twinkling', to be in heaven. By their definitions, much of this is rational. For the rest of humanity, it is simply a death sentence.

While we have for the last 70 years existed on the edge of this abyss, humans have continued in many different ways to destroy both themselves and the only environment we have that is capable of supporting them.

Societal psychosis

The U.S. is a country born of violence, racial hatred, mysogeny, slavery, bigotry, greed, and corruption. It has a rather savage history covered over with many rationalizations, self serving platitudes, and a media system that inculcates the idea of an indispensable nation beholden to none, better than all, and necessary for global 'peace'. It is evident that peace in those terms is a concept which when examined logically reduces down to a large military force, large subversive service forces, and a global financial/corporate setup - the "Washington consensus" - that allows no deviance from supporting the U.S. petrodollar.

In a reality check, the U.S. essentially suffers from a mass psychosis.

It worships its military, its warriors - although not enough to keep the veterans healthy and alive. The military personnel are honoured at football games, in schools, on American Idol and the Voice. It venerates the idea of "rugged individualism" as exemplified in the writings of Ayn Rand, many Hollywood movies, and many political and business figures. But the rugged individual rides on the backs of others without caring about others and their fortunes

or misfortunes. The veneration is a lie.

Mass murders are commonplace, creating a momentary weeping and wailing and moaning and gnashing of teeth before it becomes business as usual in a week or two as the media moves on to more current newsworthy events. But the psychosis, the paranoia, the fear runs deep and continues on. When a motorcycle backfires in New York's Times Square, people run in fearful panic. A shelf falls over in a department store and the customers panic thinking they heard gunshots. School backpacks with bullet protection are selling for school kids (but don't look up "bulletproof" on Amazon, all you will get is product line of supposed health products as the other pages have been removed).

Life is lived as a consumer. It is lived as an automobile. It is lived in vapid entertainments and diversions supporting ignorance of others and the environment. Life is lived for the short term, for the daily, weekly or quarterly gain, while the months and years after will somehow take care of themselves.

From its history, from its cultural development, U.S. society - and indeed much of western society - is based on violence of one form or another. It is no surprise as economic and environmental conditions worsen, as the military is spread globally to use its violence on other peoples of the world, that violence will become the norm domestically.

Voices in the wilderness

Donald Trump is the real life personification of all the irrational violence of U.S. and western culture. He exposes in his crudeness, megalomania, and outright narcissism the ugly truth about U.S. power both domestically and internationally. Others have worked with it, softened its image, but none have ever simply left it all open for display as Trump is doing.

In a sense, our society is still very much a wilderness, even wilder and more deadly in some respects than when our ancestors had to survive in a more natural environment without all our modern technology. There is both hope and despair in this wilderness.

The despair is obvious, but there are many doing their best to counter the hatred and violence even while immersed in the range of what is 'normal' for this society. Very few of them have much if any real power, unless they can convince masses of people to some form of revolutionary action to change the way society works. Up against state violence, state tolerated violence, violent representations of national and international norms, up against the ignorance built into the system, up against a rising reactionary right wing fascism, the challenge for change is very large.

One way or another change will come. I give my strongest regard to those challenging the system, those in the front lines against the system, people like Julian Assange, Chris Hedges, Chelsea Manning, John Pilger, Pepe Escobar, Andre Vltchek, Max Blumenthal, Ramzy Baroud, Ilan Pappé, Yves Engler, Abby Martin, Robert Fisk and many many others who work consistently towards the goal of removing the layers of ignorance imposed by corporations, governments, and mainstream media. More power to their writings and actions, hoping that society will wake up to its ills before it succumbs to them.

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