

The Decline of the United States of America: The Moral, Political and Economic Causes

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"The deterioration of every government begins with the decay of the principles on which it was founded." Montesquieu, (Charles Louis de Secondat) (1689-1755)

"I am convinced that I am acting as the agent of our Creator. By fighting off the Jews, I am doing the Lord's work." Adolf Hitler (1889-1945), German politician and future German Chancellor, Mein Kampf, chap. 2, 1925

"I believe that God wants me to be president." George W. Bush, American 43rd president, speech in Washington D.C., June 1, 2004

"This economy of ours is on a solid foundation." George W. Bush, American 43rd president, January 4, 2008 (N.B.: the U.S. economy was about to enter into recession.)

"I believe that the Iraqi people will greet us as liberators." Sen. John McCain, March 20, 2003

"We used to hustle over the border for health care we received in Canada. And I think now, isn't that ironic?" Sarah Palin, American politician and former governor of Alaska, (admitting that her family used to get treatment in Canada's single-payer health care system, despite having demonized such government-run programs as socialized medicine that will lead to death-panel-like rationing, March 6, 2010)

"The Lord says be submissive. Wives, you are to be submissive to your husbands." Michele Bachmann, Rep. of Minnesota and 2012 Republican presidential candidate, (on the question of submitting to the authority of her husband, 2006). Rep. Bachmann is also a graduate of Oral Roberts University.

"Let the woman learn in silence with all subjection. But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence."

The Bible (New Testament), 1 Timothy 2:11-12

"Think of the American economy as a large apartment block. A century ago—even 30 years ago—it was the object of envy. But in the last generation its character has changed. The penthouses at the top keep getting larger and larger. The apartments in the middle are feeling more and more squeezed and the basement has flooded. To round it off, the elevator is no longer working. That broken elevator is what gets people down the most." Lawrence Katz, Harvard University economist, 2010

The American Economy is in the Doldrums, the American Political System is Dysfunctional and Paralyzed

Around the world, many are baffled by what's happening to the United States. It seems that all at once the wheels are going off the cart. The American economy is in the doldrums, the American political system is dysfunctional and paralyzed, and a series of elective, far away foreign wars is ruining the country.

The U.S. economy used to be an engine of economic growth and the American political system used to be a well-oiled checks-and-balances machine that was geared toward progress and that could accommodate both leadership and compromise. Moreover, Americans can be proud that their constitution, at least on paper, is one of the best in the world, having been crafted by enlightened founders who believed in individual and democratic freedom.

In this short article, I will identify what I think to be the two major causes of America's current decline. (I welcome comments.)

The first cause is a moral one: it is related to the widespread corruption that permeates many institutions and sectors of the U.S. society, the most corrupt of them all being the political system and the corporate system. It is no accident that the epicenter where these two corrupt systems meet is at the Pentagon, an agency that reports upon reports picture as a cesspool of corruption.

The result of that widespread corruption is that the United States is now generating a sub-standard class of politicians to administer its affairs who are not the servants of the common good, but who rather serve happily the narrow money interests that finance them. The U.S. corporate elite, for the most part, has abandoned all loyalty to its country while it roams the world in order to make short-term profits at all costs and avoid paying taxes in its country of origin.

The result: wacky politicians and greedy business people are in charge.

The same can be said about the biased corporate media who have also abandoned all pretenses of neutrality and objectivity in informing the people and who have rather donned the mantle of unadulterated propaganda in order to cynically manipulate information and public opinion, to the delight of their money masters.

Things were never perfect in the past, but I would argue that the current level and scope of corruption in the U.S. society is unprecedented and is a root cause of the decline of the United States.

The second cause of American decline is more structural and more economic in nature. It is related to a widespread ignorance of the practical consequences of economic and financial globalization that began under the Nixon Republican administration (1969-1973) and which accelerated under the Republican administrations of Ronald Reagan (1981-1989) and of George H. Bush (1989-1993).

I shall tackle each of these causes separately.

I- The U. S. has abandoned its Democratic Ideals and the Quality of its Politicians is Sub-Standard

Let's talk first about the moral and political causes of American decline.

British Prime Minister Winston Churchill (1874-1965) once quipped that “democracy is the worst form of government, except for all the others.”! Indeed, democracy is a very fragile political system that can sometimes fail the very people it is designed to serve. American president Abraham Lincoln (1809-1865) defined it as “a government of the people, by the people, and for the people.”

But democracy is at its worst when an oligarchy takes control of a country’s institutions and imposes its agenda. Such is the case with today’s United States. Money interests, not the sovereign people, control the political system today; they control the corporate media system, they control the U.S. Supreme Court and much of the judicial system and, I would argue, they control a large chunk of the academic system.

The results are everywhere to be seen. The United States has reached levels of inequality in wealth and income that used to be seen only in some backyard third-world countries.

Another form of political corruption and of intellectual decay is the widespread refusal nowadays to abide by article VI of the U.S. Constitution. Indeed, article VI expressly stipulates that “no religious Test shall ever be required as a Qualification to any Office or public Trust under the United States.” This would seem to me to be clear enough.

Some fifty years ago, in 1960, Sen. John F. Kennedy was elected president of the United States, stating that his religious beliefs were his own personal affair and that, as an elected official for all the people, he was going to use his best judgment in his public decisions, and not be obligated to follow the diktats of any established religion, not even of his own, the Roman Catholic Church, nor its foreign Pope.

As an indication of how much the United States has regressed on the question of separation of Church and State, consider that a presidential candidate of the quality of Sen. John F. Kennedy would most likely not be elected to office today with such a stand of intellectual independence. Mind you, most of the Fathers of the U.S. Constitution could not be elected either, a clear indication that the United States has strayed away from its founding principles.

Consider what President James Madison (1751-1836) had to say about religion in politics: “The number, the industry, and the morality of the priesthood, and the devotion of the people have been manifestly increased by the total separation of the Church from the State.” Do you really believe that President Madison could be elected today? Nowadays, in fact, religious zealots dominate the Republican party while some half of democrats think that a presidential candidate must have “strong religious beliefs” to be considered for public office. The only problem is that such a view is in direct conflict to what the U.S. Constitution says!

Mixing personal and official religion with democratic politics is a form of intellectual corruption. —It’s dynamite. If the United States continues in the same destructive direction that many theocratic Muslim countries have followed for centuries, with disastrous results, I would not hesitate to predict that the U. S. will self-destruct.

II- The Widespread Confusion Between What Works in an Open Economy as Compared with a Closed Economy

Let’s talk economics.

The U. S. economy, like most industrial economies, is an open economy. This means that goods and services can be exported and imported while facing a minimum of border taxes and other barriers to international trade. For a quarter of a century now, it has also meant that the U. S. economy is part of the economic globalization model. The latter goes much further than free trade: it means that corporations and banks can move their capital, technology and production plants around the world in search of the greatest profit and the best investment environment. I happen to believe that this globalization model has been pushed too far and has become a major cause of economic stagnation in the industrial economies.

When it comes to economic policies, what can work in a closed economy does not necessarily work in an open economy. Consider macroeconomic policies to stimulate a stagnant economy. In an open economy, keynesian-type stimulus policies of deficit government spending or of tax reduction do not work properly, essentially because stimulus policies of this type are the equivalent of heating a house in winter with the windows and doors wide open. The new deficit spending may help the world economy, since much of the new spending ends up abroad, but the domestic multiplier effect of such spending can be very low. This means that such an economic stimulus in an open economy may not be as effective in stimulating economic activity as hoped and, in some circumstances, it can do more harm than good.

Nevertheless, many politicians (and some economists!) cling to the old idea that lowering taxes for the rich when the government is in deficit or new non-infrastructure government deficit spending can stimulate the economy. This obviously does not work, at least not if the new deficit spending is not focused domestically. Spending deficit money in Afghanistan or in Iraq doesn't much stimulate the U.S. economy!

What works in an open economy are policies geared toward changing relative prices in order to encourage domestic production and employment. First of all, a lowering of the real exchange rate can encourage net exports and stimulate domestic production and employment, provided the government does not sustain excessive domestic absorption through unproductive large deficits.

Another approach to skew relative prices in favor of domestic production and employment is to use the tax system accordingly. Presently, many American corporations are hardly taxed at all on their profits when they operate abroad. Some appropriate taxation of these profits can encourage repatriation of capital and support additional domestic investments. It may be argued that the American political system is not flexible enough to allow for the use of tax policies to encourage domestic production and employment. If so, this would be another indication that the current state of the political system in the U. S. is inimical to economic progress.

These are only a few examples of public policies that can have a positive impact on the functioning of the economy.

In general, and that will be my conclusion, I would say that it is in the interest of any country to avoid giving power to idiots, ignoramuses, incompetents, devious and delusional characters or to demagogues. If not, watch out. —More countries are destroyed by their own politicians than by foreign armies.

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The book "The Code for Global Ethics, Ten Humanist Principles", by Dr. Rodrigue Tremblay, prefaced by Dr. Paul Kurtz, has just been released by Prometheus Books.

Please visit the book site at:

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