

The Mythical United States of America: Rushing into Backwardness

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The mythical United States of America so highly lauded exists nowhere. It is a Shangri-la. The Preamble of the Constitution makes perfectly clear what kind of nation the United States was meant to be. What exists today fulfills none of those goals. Some have argued that the nation was a fraud from day one. Whether accurate or not, what is clear is that it most certainly was quickly murdered by John Marshall, Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, who wrote the decision known as Marbury v. Madison. Since that day, the Court has replicated England's seventeenth century political economy absent only the monarchy. Today's United States of America is a seventeenth century nation adorned with twenty first century trinkets, many deadly. Instead of being as it claims "the leader of the free world," it is a backward authoritarian pre-enlightenment reactionary regime.

Because my OED is inaccessible at the moment, I cannot specify exactly when the word 'philanthropy,' which etymologically means "love of mankind," came to be applied to the donating of money to build self aggrandizing enterprises. But alas, it has! People seem to have a way of twisting meanings in ways that make the malevolent appear benevolent. And so, enterprises of all kinds have been funded by such 'philanthropy.'

For instance, Carnegie Mellon University was founded by Andrew Carnegie, Andrew W. and Richard B. Mellon; Cornell University was founded by Ezra Cornell and Andrew Dickson White; Purdue University was founded by John Purdue; Rice University was founded by William Marsh Rice; Stanford University was founded by Leland Stanford and his wife. There are hundreds more.

There are museums, too (The Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, The Amon Carter Museum of American Art, The Kimbell Art Museum, The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, The Whitney Museum of American Art and many more), concert halls (Louise M. Davies Symphony Hall, Carnegie Hall, Avery Fisher Hall, The Eastman Theatre, Morton H. Meyerson Symphony Center to name just a few), Opera Houses (The Nancy Lee and Perry R. Bass Performance Hall, The Dorothy Chandler Pavilion, The Peabody Opera House, The Margot and Bill Winspear Opera House, The BAM Howard Gilman Opera House), innumerable charitable foundations and buildings built for public use such a libraries.

Although it is difficult to deny some merit to most of these enterprises, it is also difficult to even imagine that when Christ said, "love thy neighbor as thyself," he was advocating the kind of love philanthropy has come to express. But belittling philanthropy is not the intent of this piece. These examples are intended solely to lay the basis for an exposition of some contrasts and to draw some revealing conclusions from them.

First of all, the kind of giving described above is not the only kind of giving that has become prevalent. During last week's midterm electioneering, unspecified amounts of money were donated anonymously to Political Action Committees in an attempt to influence the electoral process. What distinguishes this group of donors from those above is the anonymity. The benefactors, in the first group, like the Pharaohs of Ancient Egypt, have no qualms about putting their names on their projects. (I suspect that more often than not, they insist upon it.) But not the donors in the second group.

Why? I suspect a principle lies behind the difference: *People do not hide that in which they take pride!* The benefactors in the first group are proud of their giving, they want it made known to all, they want to be remembered for it. So why wouldn't the "benefactors" in the second group be equally proud of their beneficence? Are they merely cowards who lack the courage of their convictions? Or are they ashamed of what they are doing? Are they hiding their shame behind their anonymity? In either case, they cannot be judged kindly.

Anonymity, however, is just one manifestation of a deeper and growing tendency in American society—the trend toward more and more secrecy, and no one, to my knowledge, has revealed the ultimate, disastrous consequences of this tendency.

Recently, Sir John [Sawers](#), the head of Britain's Secret Intelligence Service, MI6, devoted much of a 30-minute address to the central role of secrecy in maintaining security. "Secrecy", he said, "is not a dirty word. Secrecy is not there as a cover-up. Secrecy plays a crucial part in keeping Britain safe and secure. If our operations and methods become public, they won't work."

Alas, Sir John is obviously not a master of the King's English. Secrecy is by definition a cover-up. But Sir John doesn't mean cover-up in the simple sense of hidden; he wants to claim that nothing unseemly or objectionable is being covered up. Unfortunately, that claim is impossible to verify and, if accepted, must be accepted on trust. If someone claims s/he did nothing wrong, the what and how of it must be revealed. How else could it be shown? Yet Sir John claims that the what and how of it must be kept secret.

Consider the claim that the universe contains absolutely undetectable attributes. The sentence appears to make perfectly good sense, but it doesn't. How could the claim ever be given a truth value? All one can really do upon hearing or reading it is shrug one's shoulders. The sentence has no content. The claim that secrets are not cover-ups is similar. To know that what is secret is not a cover-up, the secret must be revealed, but by definition alone, a secret cannot be revealed and be a secret. Such claims are entirely meaningless.

So why should anyone trust the pronouncements of governments and their agents anyhow? That they lie has been demonstrated over and over again in history. In reality, all that the secrecy actually does is arouse suspicion; secrecy leads people to distrust their governments. It also leads nations to distrust each other, and a world in which nations distrust each other is unstable, dangerous, and primed for disaster.

Governmental secrecy also annuls any trappings of democracy that a nation may exhibit. Even a perfectly rational citizenry would be unable to make rational judgments on matters of policy that are kept from it by secrecy. How can anyone be expected to make a rational judgment about something s/he is unaware of? Rational thinking requires premises that are factual. Without that knowledge, the electoral process is a mere formal, meaningless

exercise. The people may be told that they are sovereign, but they do not even play a meaningful role in the process. The trappings of democracy do not make a nation democratic. Only transparently revealed truth and honesty do.

Most people assume that the American government is paralyzed by ideological intransigence. The assumption is that our political class has taken the attitude, "my way or no way." But another possibility exists. Perhaps those who truly hold power, those who like things the way they are and want to contravene any change, immediately corrupt or isolate all newly elected officials and all of the ideological rhetoric that is heard is merely theater played to give people the impression that the politicians care. How else can anyone explain how everything stays the same after election after election calls for change? How else can the Congress continue to act as it always has in the face of decades of approval ratings in the lowest quartile? How else can anyone explain why Congress after Congress is a do nothing Congress? Is it because American elections are totally fraudulent? Is it because the Congress has a secret master who functions behind the electoral system?

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Some have argued that the nation was a fraud from day one, that the convention that drafted the Constitution was comprised of colonial elite who set out to create a nation that protected their privileges. The facts cited by those making the claim are accurate; the reasoning is often strained. Yet the claim cannot easily be refuted.

Even if the nation was not stillborn, it most certainly was quickly murdered. The dastardly deed took place on February 24, 1803. The killer was John Marshall, Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, who wrote the decision known as *Marbury v. Madison*, which is not only absurdly argued but treacherous on two accounts. First, Marshall takes the position that "It is emphatically the province and duty of the judicial department to say what the law is" which results in the Court's becoming the sole Constitutional authority subject to no review. Since that day, the Court has ruled the United States of America as a judicial oligarchy. Second, the decision provides the Court with a paradigm on which it could base clearly and obviously unjust decisions. Marshall agreed that *Marbury* was entitled to relief but refused to provide it. That is clearly unjust; yet the Constitution clearly says that one of the nation's purposes is to "establish justice."

Even though Marshall's argument is absurd, no one but Jefferson challenged it. He writes, "the opinion which gives to the judges the right to decide what laws are constitutional and what not, not only for themselves in their own sphere of action but for the Legislature and Executive also in their spheres, would make the Judiciary a despotic branch." It is clearly contradictory to say on the one hand that the Court has the duty to "say what the law is" and then say that the Court is constrained from providing *Marbury* with the relief he is entitled to because the written Constitution doesn't give the Court the authority to grant it. The written Constitution doesn't give the Court the authority to "say what the law is" either. Yet no one pointed out that if it were the Court's duty to say "what the law is," legislatures are superfluous. So Marshall on this day, murdered the Republic.

Why no one but Jefferson cared is curious. Was it, indeed, because the colonial elite who had taken control of the government never really fully supported the Constitution's republican principles? We will never know. But before the Constitution was ratified, the colonies were

rife with political tracts both in favor of and against its ratification. The Federalist Papers are the most well known of these and were apparently written by Alexander Hamilton, James Madison, and John Jay. All three were alive when Marshall's opinion was issued; yet none wrote a single tract in opposition to Marshall's action. How strange!

Yet, the result is obvious. What John Marshall did was reproduce England's seventeenth century political economy absent only the monarchy, and the courts have promoted and maintained this abomination ever since. Today's United States of America is a seventeenth century nation adorned with twenty first century trinkets, many deadly. Instead of being as it claims "the leader of the free world," it is a backward authoritarian pre-enlightenment reactionary regime. That people is the big secret! It dare not be revealed.

In early modern Europe the state was organized to fight more and more intense wars which requires professional armies and leads national governments into perennial debt. Some claim that the need to fight bigger and bigger wars created the state as we know it. Diplomacy was carried on by nations in secret from opponents, adversaries, and their own peoples. Although not yet known as such, Realpolitik characterized the age. Politics and diplomacy were based primarily on considerations of power and national interests, not ideals, morals, or principles. Balancing the power of authoritarian nations was said to be necessary to keep the peace, but it never did. How does this description of seventeenth century Europe differ from a description of the world's condition today? What is different?

Calling the United States a backward authoritarian pre-enlightenment reactionary nation may seem harsh, but how else can anyone explain, no less justify, the American willingness to overthrow democratically elected governments, support right-wing dictatorships, and become a willing partner with the most corrupt nations on earth? No nation steeped in the principles of democracy would engage in such practices.

So what do advocates of this seventeenth century realpolitik hope to achieve? To what end is this policy being pursued? Three hundred years of history has shown that it will never bring peace or security. Going to war to preserve the peace is absurd; anyone who advocates such nonsense should be ridiculed into hiding.

People, remember this. Empires upon which it was said that the sun never set disintegrated in plain daylight. All the king's horses and all the king's men could not bind them together. So I propose that everyone ask an Englishman this question: What of value does today's ordinary Englishman possess that s/he would not have possessed had the Empire never existed? When you learn the answer to that question you will realize how all the resources and lives lost to create and attempt to hold the Empire were totally wasted. And that is what always happens to the resources and people expended in empire building.

People, secrecy is an abomination. *People do not hide that in which they take pride!* When governments keep secrets, they're hiding shameful, immoral, or illegal acts. War is the opposite of peace and cannot secure it. Secrecy breeds distrust, suspicion, and conflict; they are not ways of winning friends and influencing people. Realpolitik is really Vilepolitik. Until the welfare of human beings everywhere rather than the welfare of institutions becomes the goal of human activity, the people will never be anything but canon and factory fodder to be sacrificed for absolutely nothing worthwhile.

So it's time, past time, way past time to close the door on seventeenth century authoritarian government.

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