

The Trees of the Particular: Why the Tea Party is Just Another Tree In the Forest of Identity Politics

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You can't see the forest for the tea bags.

"The twentieth century has been characterized by three developments of great political importance: the growth of democracy, the growth of corporate power, and the growth of corporate propaganda as a means of protecting corporate power against democracy.

Corporate propaganda directed...to the public at large, has two main objectives: to identify the free-enterprise system in popular consciousness with every cherished value, and to identify interventionist governments and strong unions (the only agencies capable of checking the complete domination of society by the corporations) with tyranny, oppression and even subversion."
(1)

"One of the saddest lessons of history is this: If we've been bamboozled long enough, we tend to reject any evidence of the bamboozle. We're no longer interested in finding out the truth. The bamboozle has captured us. It is simply too painful to acknowledge -even to ourselves-that we've been so credulous." (2)

People in a group who see themselves as "all in the same boat" tend to cooperate to promote the group's general welfare and invest in the common good to create prosperity for all. That's a social contract. But we're not all in the same boat. A very few of us are on a luxury liner and the rest of us are lucky if we're issued leaky life rafts or tattered life preservers.

Those on the luxury liner encourage groups within the larger group to see themselves as separate, and further, that gains by any one group comes at the expense of the other groups. But this is true only insofar as the group at the top of the economic pyramid, the "opulent minority," is taking from them all. Internal conflicts within the larger group escalate, tearing it apart. Once these splinter groups have done their work for them, (they always have someone to do their work for them), the "opulent minority" comes to feast on the financial remains of the social contract.

If a government of the people does not provide a safety net that some of us - the poor, children, the aged, minorities, the disabled, the jobless and the homeless - cannot provide for ourselves, we will be crushed underfoot by the "opulent minority," the carpet of our bodies simply Sir Walter Raleigh's cloak laid down for the Queen Elizabeth of the "opulent minority" to tread upon on the way to profit.

But Americans are rigidly schooled **not** to connect the dots, whether they're facts, logical arguments, pictures-worth-a-thousand-words, or individual "human interest" stories. We may have access to, and in fact, be carpet-bombed 24/7 with dots of information, but the sheer number of individual dots, and the fact that they have no context, is designed to numb the mind rather than cause them to be assembled in the dangerously democratic pontilism of deliberate, deductive thought. We are programmed to see nothing - no thing - unless it relates to us personally and our relationship with the matrix of materialism.

The larger reality of class is denied, and each experience appears completely individual. And even when such experiences are the obvious and common result of policy decisions made by corporate shareholders via their congressional marionettes, individual solutions to social and economic problems created by those decisions are demanded of the victims. People are left on their own to find solutions to the problems of joblessness, bankruptcy and foreclosure exacerbated by downsizing and outsourcing; the manipulated financial "crisis;" skyrocketing healthcare, energy and food costs; and substandard education. Americans take on the responsibility that belongs to a corporate system designed to produce those very outcomes. We allow ourselves to believe that we are the cause of the system's effect. If only we had tried harder we would not need to be helped. We would have pulled ourselves up by the bootstraps and got 'er done.

John Kozy says the United States is not a true society, that we're merely groups of individuals with "various and...opposing beliefs who often have little tolerance for...others." We don't live together, just side by side. Further, such groups "...openly seek to promote their own interests at the expense of the interests of all." He goes on to say that people who fall outside dominant groups are abandoned, and that "No true society...leave(s) those outside the dominant group abandoned." (3)

The society of the family, especially the extended family, has historically been "the individual's support group. ...when a person becomes ill or incapacitated, when children are orphaned, when people become elderly, the family provides the needed support" (4) because the individual may not be able to take care of himself. But under corporate capitalism, families are destroyed, torn apart by the need to follow jobs while being forced to live on the lowest wage possible. Support disappears along with the extended family, and the individual who can no longer care for himself unaided is abandoned.

And when people seek support from the wider society, they're dismissed as parasites who want to be taken care of by a "nanny state." But "the state" doesn't provide people with anything. "The state" is the people, who enact laws and collect taxes to fund social programs that provide a social safety net in the event that corporate capitalism, in its unrelenting drive for profit fails, as it is designed to do, regularly, and causes them to need such programs after destroying their familial support systems.

The acceptance of the need to make money in order to exist, and its subsequent, godlike primacy in our lives, dissolves all our relationships. Its exchange replaces them, becoming the only "bond" to each other we have left.

We are "***The first people on earth who (have) no practical need of our neighbors.***"

Before the financial "crisis," all your neighbors "could have died overnight...and while you might have been sad, you wouldn't have been inconvenienced. Our economy, unlike any

that came before it, is designed to work without the input of your neighbors. ... If you have a credit card and an Internet connection, you can order most of what you need and have it left anonymously at your door.” (5) (emphasis in original)

The carefully cultivated alienation of “consumers” creates a bastardized, jaded and jagged form of “rugged individualism,” excised of empathy and apotheosized. It “frees” us from interdependence on one another – and makes us completely dependent on corporations. And economic dependence always comes with a price, the special prerogatives of those upon whom you are dependent to do with you as they will. We cannot purchase a home, a car or use a credit card without the enabling hand of the finance corporations. We are not safe from the ravages of a sudden accident or a major illness without monthly payments to the insurance corporations, which allow us to pay pharmaceutical corporations and hospital corporations for our care. We ride to work, for a large corporation, in cars bought from the auto corporations and fueled by the energy corporations, which also light, heat and power our homes, purchased from real estate corporations. We communicate with each other primarily via the telecommunications corporations and receive our information, and much of our entertainment, from media corporations. We cannot even feed ourselves without going to supermarkets and fast food franchises to purchase the products of agricultural corporations.

Corporations are a stunningly efficient means of accumulating and concentrating wealth, which can then be translated into political power. Democracy disperses power. Corporations concentrate power. Corporations are property. And property as power, accumulated in the hands of a few invariably becomes power over the majority, power over their thoughts, their livelihoods, their communities, their government and their environment. Natural persons, human beings, are fast becoming faceless commodities, mere human resources to be consumed by shareholders hiding behind the powerful shield of property, the faceless, artificial persons also known as corporations.

And because our capitalist “economic system...compounds the problem by the idiotic dogma that the only groups that corporations are responsible to are their shareholders,” (6) people who have been dependent on corporations, and are subsequently screwed by them, have no place to turn but the social safety net created by their government.

But should we actually connect these dots, the cognitive dissonance, the pain of holding two diametrically-opposed thoughts at the same time, jerks us back into the comfortable straitjacket of the American Dream like dogs wearing shock collars. We cannot accept the truth, hidden in plain sight, that capitalism, the system which has been sold to us as exemplifying the American Dream, is actually a nightmarish, serial murderer-rapist which forces us to tell it how much we love it as it rapes and murders us. And further, we cannot accept the part that we play in it.

Truth is an alien entity. It might set us free and turn us out of our faux-gilded cages without our tawdry toys and plastic/electronic pacifiers. And since the “opulent minority” realizes that “freedom is participation in power,” (7) which is knowledge, our opinion is continuously and meticulously manufactured for us by all five major hubs of the corporate-owned “news” media, a compendium of the interests and opinions of their major shareholders. This is not news. “News is what powerful people don’t want you to know. Everything else is just public relations.” (8)

Such “news” is repeated endlessly in endless confections “...to give you the idea that you

have freedom of choice...you don't. You have no choice. You have owners. They own you. They own everything. They own all the important land. They own, and control the corporations. They've long since bought, and paid for the Senate, the Congress, the state houses, the city halls, they got the judges in their back pockets and they own all the big media companies, so they control just about all of the news and the information you get to hear. They got you by the balls. They spend billions of dollars every year lobbying...lobbying, to get what they want...We know what they want. They want more for themselves and less for everybody else, but I'll tell you what they don't want...They don't want a population of citizens capable of critical thinking. They don't want well informed, well educated people capable of critical thinking." (9)

What they want is us immersed in the corporate-created "culture," three-pound cheeseburger in hand, talking into a Bluetooth while driving an SUV, heading home to our McMansions made of pressed sawdust patties surrounded by resin gnomes made in China, protected by disease care that looks after our diabetes, heart disease, obesity and cancers created by the producers of foodlike products polluted by the same poisonous organophosphates developed to gas soldiers in World War I and refined for use in gas chambers in World War II. We mainline their media like junkies and lie down for these corporations and their shareholders like cheap whores, willing to call the choice from among their thousands of narcotic trinkets freedom. We trade our identities, our "souls," our "selves" for these poisonous, quality-less "products," which are nothing more than a means to relieve us of the money we received for the work of creating the wealth that made the production of those tawdry trinkets possible.

And the "opulent minority" prefers that we aid and abet, or at least ignore, their system of repellent social immorality by concentrating on satisfying our material whims (as they do), calling it individualism. But individualism is what they steal by selling myriad commodities as personality components which we come to call our "selves." And though we believe we are unique individuals, what we are are the perfect, isolated atoms of capitalism, the Borg awash in others exploited exactly like ourselves, with engineered boundaries impervious to penetration by either empathy or deep thought, our self-absorption spent in intense concentration not on the individual self inside, but that impervious outer surface, which is not the "self" at all, but an insecure avatar, the vehicle, **not** the driver.

And as we lose more of our "selves," relying on the unthinking ease of living vicariously through the avatars we've constructed of parts purchased from corporations, we lose more and more of our self-respect (there's no self left to respect). And the "opulent minority," which has never respected us anyway, see in our craven behavior, a confirmation of their contempt for us.

For the chance to be like them, we compete against each other for the slim-to-none chance at grabbing the brass class ring and throw away the very power we possess – solidarity – as the demos, the people, of a democracy. And this is by design, since democracy threatens minority rule by bridging the moat they create by injecting group prejudices meant to keep us fragmented – racism, sexism, agism, homophobia, xenophobia, religious fanaticism, etc. – because politics consists of deciding who gets what and how much. Therefore it cannot be separated from daily life. And the people cannot be separated from each other if the participatory work of democracy is to be accomplished.

"You do not love humanity if you seek to divide humanity into jealous camps.

...the man who seeks to make personal capital out of the passions of his fellow men. ...has lost touch with the ideal of America." (10)

As far as the "opulent minority" is concerned, the ideal is subordination. And the best way to enforce it is to manufacture poor people. "It is also in the interest of a tyrant to keep his people poor, so that they may not be able to afford the cost of protecting themselves by arms and be so occupied with their daily lives that they have no time for rebellion." (11)

When the minimum wage leaves workers begging, it creates the conditions for dependence – and submission. And this can be carried to the point where the abused develop Stockholm Syndrome, growing to defend, and even love, their abusers, actually insisting that their ignorance and abuse be protected and perpetuated. "The more we do to you, the less you seem to believe we are doing it." (12) Poverty doesn't just happen. Someone has to cultivate it very carefully. And it must be so abject, so loathsome that the remaining working and middle classes fear its contagion like the 14th century's Black Plague.

The "opulent minority" also believes that education is a good thing, as long as it furthers our submission and prepares us for a busywork job. If it makes you think, it's no longer such a good thing, because, as Frederick Douglass said, "Education makes a man unfit to be a slave." Our parents, previously indoctrinated, begin our training and then surrender us to an authoritarian "educational" system where we are stripped of our personal identity and our free will, while ethically-cleansed of our conscience and the responsibility for making meaningful choices. Once stripped of autonomy, all the important decisions can be made for us. We're designed us that way.

John D. Rockefeller's General Education Board made it plain.

"In our dreams, we have limitless resources and the people yield themselves with perfect docility to our molding hands. The present education conventions fade from their minds, and unhampered by tradition, we work our own good will upon a grateful and responsive rural folk. We shall not try to make these people or any of their children into philosophers or men of learning, or men of science. We have not to raise up from among them authors, editors, poets or doctors, preachers, politicians, statesmen, of whom we have an ample supply. The task we set before ourselves is very simple as well as a very beautiful one, to train these people as we find them to do in a perfect way the things their fathers and mothers are doing in an imperfect way, in the homes, in the shops and on the farm." (13)

John D. Rockefeller was the principal progenitor of Standard Oil, the greatest corporate monopoly since the British East India Company. He and many like-minded plutocrats decided that the rabble could have all the democratic freedoms they wanted – as long as they were too ignorant, overworked and distracted to be able to use them. "Those who are fit to rule realize there is no morality and that there is only one natural right – the right of the superior to rule over the inferior..." (14) Only the winners of the Social Darwinist lottery deserve to be treated like human beings. The rest of us are just spare, and easily replaceable, parts in the corporate mechanism for accumulating and concentrating wealth, which is then translated into political power.

And to make sure the parts know their place, the skill has been taken out of the work process. Every step in the making of, for instance, a dining room chair, is tightly controlled. Where the fine craftsmanship of Hepplewhite and Chippendale are highly prized among the

“opulent minority,” the “man” in craftsmanship must be divested of the knowledge and ability that goes into the making of such fine furniture lest he believe he’s created something of value, and, in turn, that **he** is something of value.

The process is de-skilled, broken down into simple rules, formulas and actions, and all knowledge of the complete process is transferred to an overseer class of management. Overseers can conduct time-and-motion studies to extract the maximum productivity for each step in a process designed to require minimal input on the part of the worker/tool.

It is particularly focused on divorcing thought from action. The overseers will do all the thinking, thank you. And those who do all of the work will do none of the thinking – or decision-making. Those who do the thinking and decision-making will do none of the actual work. Workers are reduced to tools made of flesh, bodies attached to hands that make the discrete twists and turns and twitches of the production process.

Every one of these minute and meaningless tasks is tightly controlled by the overseers. Each set of hands receives a set of detailed instructions: the precise description of the task to be completed; the method which must be used to complete it; and how much time the hands are allowed in which to complete it.

The worker is no longer a craftsman creating a fine piece of furniture, but a small part of a machine, adaptable to a wide variety of exceedingly simple tasks, such as machine-cutting, sanding, varnishing, polishing, gluing, sewing a straight seam, placing stuffing under a chair pad, etc. And we wind up with a cavalierly-made dining room chair, which it is hoped will fall apart quickly and be replaced, all the while off-gassing formaldehyde as it sits at the dining room table.

This method, created by Frederick Winslow Taylor (Taylorism) in the 19th century, works so well to cut costs and to produce submission on the part of the worker/hands that it’s “spread to (most) other sectors of the economy, including food service, education, and medicine.” (15)

And as labor, the great tradeoff we make is the Cardinal Act of Consumption. We accept the opportunity to imitate the lifestyles of the rich and shameless as just compensation for becoming obedient, alienated cogs in the corporate profit-making machine. We unthinkingly exchange our wages for the commodities that enable this emulation. The function of this mindless mimicry is to conceal class difference.

And the less we think, the more we will buy, thus more profit is created. The faster we swipe those plastic I.O.U./slave chain cards, the more time we have to swipe them again. Whether we swipe them for resin gnomes, sawdust homes, mis-education, poisonous foodlike products, disease care, electronic distractions, media propaganda or gas for SUVs, the Treadmill of Endless Purchase must go on, because the more we think about a purchase, the less likely we are to make it.

“Our enormously productive economy...demands that we make consumption a way of life, that we convert the buying and use of goods into rituals, that we seek our spiritual satisfaction, our ego satisfaction in consumption... We need things consumed, burned up, replaced and discarded at an ever-accelerating rate.” (16)

We have been engineered into "...a people that value ease and convenience over self education, sacrifice and truth. ... We want the kind of life...that does not place demands on us. We want to be entertained, not informed by burdensome truths that may assault our conscience and cause psychological injury." (17)

"Men fear thought as they fear nothing else on earth - more even than death...Thought is subversive and revolutionary, destructive and terrible, thought is merciless to privilege, established institutions, and comfortable habit." (18)

Knowledge is dangerous. Knowledge creates doubt. Knowledge is power. That's why we're not allowed to have it. That's what's missing in our test score-based, obedience schooling. That's why real information is missing in corporate-created entertainments. That's why it was illegal to teach slaves to read. That's what pissed off the Church about the printing press. And that's why knowledge (of good and evil) was given the rap of original sin. A person who thinks for himself is a threat to minority rule. Lots of people who think for themselves can become a democracy, the very antithesis of minority rule.

And the best way to prevent democracy is to turn the people against each other and against their government, which is, in fact, themselves, and the only real check on predatory corporatism. This was the smartest, most evilly efficient thing the "opulent minority" has ever accomplished. And thus "...incalculable damage has been done to American society. Just exactly as was intended." (19)

This allowed the radical restructuring of the United States government in order to serve the interests of corporate shareholders. Government has been occupied by the minions of the "opulent minority" and turned into an institutionalized system of inequality. Purchased politicians use it as a pipeline to funnel wealth from American taxpayers to the "opulent minority" ensconced behind the corporate curtain of faux freedom and democracy. And as the overall standard of living declines due to their financial coup d'état, our pain is their gain. The increase in the population of prey due to job loss, bankruptcy, foreclosure, homelessness and hunger actually stimulates these predators to pluck us like the low-hanging fruit of their poisonous corporate tree.

They've realized their parasitic "goal of radically redistributing wealth in America." They've done away with almost all of the government-created speed bumps that impeded their progress in the race to uncontested minority rule, the "...presumptive power to tax, to regulate, to provide services, and to set the fundamental rules for...economic life in a society. All of these had to be challenged to insure that a wealthy overclass could become fantastically more wealthy, and the easiest way to do that was to corrode the status and power of government itself. Teaching people to hate their own government is one way to divest them of it..." (20)

They've committed "...the crime of the century...the evisceration of the state. This must be done (or, more accurately, it must be done in some respects but absolutely not in others) because the state is the only force capable of standing up to the power of concentrated wealth, and because the state nominally speaks for the public and the public interest, as against the private interest." (21)

By the late 1960s the post-war economic boom had begun to bust, and the Democratic Party started to distance itself from Labor and from the New Deal policies that had not only created the greatest period of American prosperity overall, but the largest middle class in the history of the world. As it moved away from even the timid social reforms of the New Deal, the Democratic Party re-branded itself, christening diversity as the pinnacle of progressivism and incorporating Identity Politics into its platform.

Identity Politics are those of specific subsets of the population as a whole. They may be delineated by race, sex, ethnicity, religion, gender or sexual orientation, age, economic or educational status, ideology, et al. When members of these groups see themselves as isolated subsets within the population, there's less chance that they'll come together in solidarity to disrupt minority rule. Under capitalism, they are especially encouraged, unless of course they become too powerful in their own right or threaten to coalesce. For instance, the Civil Rights Movement was threatening to become an overall Poor People's Movement. It's for this reason that Dr. Martin Luther King was assassinated.

The Democratic Party used Identity Politics to co-opt elite layers of minorities and women by dispensing privileges, even as the living standards for the majority of Democratic voters deteriorated across the board. They used these Balkanized, competing interest groups to disguise the party's move further and further to the right. Unions faded into the background and diversity was used as a front to hide the party's rejection of any concept of "democracy that included economic equality and regulation of the corporate-financial elite." (22) It culminated in the New Democrats of the Democratic Leadership Council (DLC), like Al Gore, Bill Clinton, and Joe Lieberman, who hid the Party's capitulation to, and appeasement of, the Right, and in fact, its joining of the Right in the Money Party.

But the use of Identity Politics as a front was not restricted to the Democrats. Identity Politics, sold as empowerment by both parties since the 60s, have had the overall effect of disuniting those who ought to be in solidarity with each other, stunting democracy, which requires the people's commonality to function.

"If you have watched any old mob movies, you know that any racket needs a front. In America the front is called democracy. Like the term populism, the people have no idea what democracy really is, but has something to do with the free market capitalism... And it certainly it has to do with every citizen having a small piece in the determination of national matters. Clearly untrue as that is, nevertheless it is one helluva sales point, revered by the proles and not to be fucked with if you are to maintain the illusion of the consent of the people among the people. The front." (23)

In the late 60s and early 70s Identity Politics became a two-party game. Students and anti-war/peace demonstrators were christened "bums" (Nixon's word) and the "silent majority" was pitted against them, cast as patriotic, real Americans versus Communist, hippie traitors in what was to become the "culture wars" and create divisions between us that we have yet to close.

Republicans used wedge issues to create an Identity Politics of their own. Nixon's Southern Strategy used race to get white southern Democrats into the Republican Party, just as Democrats tried to manipulate minorities with Civil Rights laws. Republicans won the day, since the population harbored a greater percentage of racist whites than Blacks, who made up only 12% of the population.

It's to the "opulent minority's" advantage to set Americans against each other and to take them on one separate issue, one action, and/or one group at a time where the majority of the people can be bogged down and defeated over and over and over again with peripheral issues and those that should remain private and personal lifestyle choices. The point of the arguments over "hot button" issues is that they're not meant to be resolved. Their political function is to divide people and hide class differences, keeping the majority's attention away from their own social and economic interests. So while many of us see the particular trees of abortion, God, guns, gays and Big Government, we miss the forest of the Class War.

In addition, the **distraction** of feigned accomodation to these individual group interests by the "opulent minority"-owned government provides the illusion that "something's being done" about abuses such as racism, sexism, joblessness, pollution, et al. Coupled with the **division** created by our intensifying individual struggles against those same abuses, the "opulent minority" gets to keep most of the wealth the majority of the people create for society, as groups - minorities, women, labor, greens, et al - focus on their individual agendas rather than the solidarity necessary to overcome entrenched, minority rule which allows the consistent redistribution of wealth "upward."

By the 80s it was obvious to anyone who connected the dots, that the Republicans dominated the government, that the Democrats had joined them in the Money Party, and that together they were wreaking havoc on **all** the groups they'd encouraged to practice Identity Politics. It was also obvious that the people themselves were becoming a problem, because they were, ostensibly, the government - federal, state and local - and therefore able to charge their elected representatives to work for the public good, just as the "opulent minority" was cementing its private, corporate dominance as embodied by Gordon Gekko.

In 1978, in *First National Bank of Boston v. Bellotti*, their Supreme Court had declared that money is speech, and the "opulent minority" were becoming more vocal in their demands to, as Joe Bageant says, "Let the green stuff talk." A government of, by and for the people was an impediment to minority rule. It was counterproductive to have "an apparatus" (in place that was) "designed to implement the popular consensus about the management of the shared material interest of the citizenry." (24)

The very existence of a government whose purpose was to promote the general welfare by means of the popular will was anathema to the "opulent minority." They had no interest in markets and trade regulated by government (rigged, yes, regulated, no), nor the maintenance of public infrastructure, education, or healthcare. They saw no need for Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid, minimum wages, maximum hours, overtime, or unions.

The very thought of giving, or receiving, help was disgusting to them - unless they were the ones on the receiving end of tax abatements, loopholes, ridiculously low capital gains taxes, subsidies, exclusion from Social Security taxes, offshore banking, the elimination of tariffs on the goods they had made overseas, downsizing and outsourcing, illegal as well as legal (H-51) immigrant labor, waivers of environmental studies for dangerous extractive projects, over-the-counter trading, unlimited interest charges on credit (usury), sales taxes, flat taxes, right-to-work laws, all that green stuff talking its way into Congress via lobbyists and the insertion of their minions into positions of prominence in regulatory agencies themselves. All this on top their ownership of the corporate mechanism for accumulating and concentrating wealth, that they then translate into political power.

For the "opulent minority" the only excuse for a central government - besides funneling

money to them – is police protection of their property and a military for “defense,” e.g. opening up reluctant foreign markets to their predatory corporations. And so they promoted the “fact” that “government is not the solution to our problem: government is the problem.” In effect, since the people are the government, the people are the problem.

The people were disowned by their own government.

“On the 20th of January, 1981, the new President of the United States was telling us that ‘we the people’ were in somebody’s way, a somebody who actually was represented by the power and authority he now held, and which he intended to use to destroy the deposed government that was ‘us.’ ...Twenty-nine years and one day after Ronald Reagan came to power, the U.S. Supreme Court made it plain, by issuing its Dred Scott decision of the 21st century, elevating corporate rights above those of individual flesh-and-blood human beings. ...Yes, we, the people, are certainly in somebody’s way,” (25) so they’ve colonized our minds, cleansing them both intellectually and ethically. And today’s method of social control is the direct descendent of the murderous and terroristic “management” of Native Americans, kidnapped Africans, and after the Civil War, of both poor whites and freed slaves via sharecropping, Jim Crow and right-to-work laws. Social control is all but “invisible” now, woven into the competitive consumption of the Consumer Bowl in today’s economic and political class system.

“There is no subjugation so perfect as that which keeps the illusion of freedom, for in that way one captures volition itself.” (26)

The “opulent minority” find their means to minority rule at the intersection of dumbed down and racism. They don’t personally give a flying tea bag about color – except when it can be used to get more of the green stuff. Any color is okay with them as long as the minority comes wrapped in green. Our president, who I like to call “The Mask,” performs his function as the overseer of our faux democracy perfectly, while taking the flak for the “opulent minority.”

But in 1921 it was still okay to kill 300 of the more “common” sort of that minority to which the president belongs and pretend it never happened. It was also okay to lynch not only Blacks and Wobblies, but those even rumored to be Communists or union supporters. You could take your children to a lynching just like you can take them to Disneyland. There’d be body parts as souvenirs and postcards to send to like-minded friends who missed the party. In 1963 it was alright to murder four little girls in Sunday school and in 1964, to lynch three civil rights workers. You could bar students from the state university (1963) and forbid them to eat lunch – at a lunch counter (1960). And just like a bully in elementary school, you could make people sit at the back of the bus (1955). And this is **still** what it’s all about, who has to sit in the back of the bus and who gets to drive.

And by using the dumbed down and ethically-cleansed to do the wet work, from the Civil War Era to the Civil Rights Era to today, the “opulent minority” picks one group to act as their pit bullies, whose only privilege is having the same skin tone as the plutocrats. They are encouraged to believe that their slightly higher-but-still-substance wages, and their ability to bankrupt themselves via usurious credit (in the richest country in the history of the world) makes them exceptional (exceptional dumbasses, maybe), and their clinging to the fact that at least, like the masters, they’re white, simply proves that imitation is the sincerest form of depravity.

“...Big Government vs. the Common Folk, ignores the fact that only the government, the people, can referee the game of unlimited corporate power. So, by targeting government, not corporatism, the Tea Partiers serve essentially as ‘faux populist’ front-men for corporate interests...” (27)

And the Tea Party, after its now-forgotten snit over Wall Street bonuses, doesn’t focus on a coherent, anti-corporate agenda, because until recently, corporate capitalism has been good to them, while it disadvantaged the groups they target today. The majority of Tea Partiers are older, wealthier, whiter men, most of whom still have jobs, and who harbor a kneejerk reaction to “income redistribution” – never mind the manipulated financial crises that redistributed income upward – both in 1929 and 2008. They fear any efforts toward a more equitable society will come out of their pockets. This subset of Identity Politics sees “equality, justice and tolerance as ‘threats’ to their alleged freedoms.” (28) Like the Maginot Line, they’re facing the wrong direction. The predator looms “above” them in the economic pecking order, not below them. But since they are authoritarians, they’re afraid to stand up to those on the next highest level of the pecking order, let alone their corporate capitalist masters.

They also believe that their group is under attack and losing control, though they never really had it. Their wages levelled off in the 70s and it’s harder than ever to get ahead when getting ahead means doing better than your parents did in a society where accumulation is the sole measure of success.

They see that **some** people seem to be making gains – Black, Hispanic, female, gay – no matter how small. It doesn’t matter that these groups’ position was formerly underfoot, “or that they haven’t caught up ...in terms of income...or legal rights...” (29) (And there’s actually only a highly visible fraction, like Oprah, Obama and Tiger that’s outdistancing them.) The point is that “they’re” moving ahead, even if only in some small way and these **real** American men are stuck in place or moving backward. And as each of us becomes more and more insignificant in the face of corporate power, these manly men have only maintained a sense of their own power, mirage that it is, by their place at the top of the dung heap of consumerism under the iron heel of corporate capitalism – which is all that makes Americans exceptional any more.

Their sense of lost privilege is what’s brewing this tea. They don’t **want** to understand that these groups of “others” they so resent are just bait, and that when they take the bait, focusing their anger and resentment on the lure of a corporate-sanctioned target group, they’re biting like the fish the “opulent minority” are playing them for. They’re just one more school of fish in the ocean of Identity Politics. They see the trees of the particular “enemy” and refuse to look at the forest, having accomodated their predators in exchange for a relatively comfortable gilded cage.

They allow themselves to be used as a human shield to protect the true source of their injury. And they allow their righteous anger at being wronged to fester as resentment and redirect it at the scapegoat du jour. By agreeing to this distraction, they fail to focus on the actual agent of their agony, and allow that agent to continue to injure them, thus the pain, the resentment and the hatred build to bursting. And hatred is another distraction. It strengthens the power of the oppressor over both the injured and the scapegoat. What we experience as inequality is a manifestation of this manipulation, because “...the power and wealth of the minority, in fact, depends on increasing the exploitation of the majority.” (30)

A lot of Tea Partiers believe it's the scapegoats they resent. But besides their free-floating anger at Big Government, liberals and socialists, what they really resent is ..."the idea that democracy is to rule and to be ruled in turns. They do not want that kind of society. They see a world where they are right and that is it. ... This is not the idea on which the United States was founded." (31)

Tea Partiers are encouraged to see immigrants as job-stealing, wage-lowering, social welfare program-using criminals in order to divert their anger from the corporate system. This is the same system that downsized and outsourced their American Dream via "free" trade agreements like NAFTA, the encouragement of both illegal and legal immigration, and the slashing of wages and living standards across the board in order to boost corporate profits. Their anger and resentment are kept alive and magnified by incessant repetition in the media. It's the secret of American working class impotence and the secret the "opulent minority" of corporate shareholders uses to maintain power. It's class war. And the winning class knows exactly what it's doing. Robber Baron Jay Gould put it in a nutshell. "I can get one half of the working class to kill the other half."

But somewhere under all the bluster, bombast and bullying these usable-husks-of-humanity realize they've taken a wrong turn. Most of them call themselves Christian, and some even go so far as to carry signs proclaiming they're "Teabagging for Jesus." They know, if they read their bibles, that the one quote their masters use, "the poor will always be with you" is used to justify whatever is done to the poor. They also know that there are 214 verses quoting Jesus' love for and defense of the poor, which have been disappeared like Guatemala's and Iran's democracies in 1953 in the service of US corporate pharisees. They know, too, that Jesus stood up for the poor and got crucified for it. And they prefer capitulation to the pharisees to crucifixion, especially if there's just a hint of the green stuff, or its red-headed stepchild, credit, attached to it. (WHOSE ARTICLE IS THIS FROM?)

Americans used to read - and write - as evidenced by the letters written by "common" Civil War soldiers. We used to be able to deal with complex problems and see through illusions to the truth. We used to be able to walk and chew gum at the same time. But many of us no longer have those skills, and as a result are completely detached from reality. We can't tell truth from lies, think for ourselves or come to our own conclusions. And we get lots of help to stay that way. The information we receive from corporate media outlets is a series of dumbed-down, simplified stories, full of trite themes conveyed by images and set off by a veritable spinmeister's treasure trove of gossip, talking points, public relations, screaming matches, framing, scamming, lies of omission and propaganda.

"Never allow the public to cool off; never admit a fault or a wrong; never concede there may be some good in your enemy; never leave room for alternatives; never accept blame; concentrate on one enemy at a time and blame him for everything that goes wrong; people will believe a big lie sooner than a little one; and if you repeat it frequently enough people will sooner or later believe it." (32)

Americans are caught like deer in headlights any time they're confronted with ambiguity or nuance. But then we no longer need to think. Our moods, emotions and impulses are manipulated, most often on a subliminal level, by elaborate psy ops that work automatically on people living a style without substance, devoid of content, context, history or reality. In fact, we prefer illusions to reality, and that makes us suckers for images and slogans, the branding by which we have come to understand the world. And we mistake our manipulated feelings for knowledge.

"Ours must be a leadership democracy administered by an intelligent minority who know how to regiment and guide the masses. The voice of the people expresses the mind of the people, and that mind is made up for it by the group leaders in whom it believes and by those persons who understand the manipulation of public opinion...If we understand the mechanism and motives of the group mind, it is now possible to control and regiment the masses according to our will without their knowing it." (33)

We want entertainment, not information, instant gratification, not the truth. We feel comforted when we are indulged with familiar stereotypes and flattered by tales of American exceptionalism "that tell us...we live in the greatest country on Earth, that we are...superior...because" of our American values and/or that God blesses America. The repetition of such "simple, childish lies...gives them the aura of... truth." (34)

Manifest Destiny. We're Number One. Yes we can. Change you can believe in. Green Revolution. Pro-life. War on Poverty. War on Drugs. Ownership Society. War on Terror. With us or against us. Support the troops. Love it or leave it. Pry my gun from my cold, dead hands.

It was George W. Bush who said "See in my line of work you got to keep repeating things over and over again for the truth to sink in, to kind of catapult the propaganda."

"Everyone has a right to a great SUV." KIA Sportage "Ameriquest Mortgage - Proud sponsor of the American Dream" "Chevrolet. An American Revolution." "Be the boss. Choose your sauce." Kentucky Fried Chicken.

In the United States, the land of the free, freedom is consolidating your credit card payments. In the country that declared its independence in 1776 with a revolutionary war, revolution means choosing the correct new fossil fuel-burning vehicle. Rebellion is symbolized by T-shirts declaring "FCUK." How clever. How daring. Purchased from a corporation out to make money on our "rebellion." How conventional is our unconvention.

President Dwight Eisenhower suggested that "...dictatorial systems make one contribution to their people which leads" those who desire nothing more than insulation from the pressures of a free society "...to support such systems - freedom from the necessity of informing themselves and making up their own minds..." (35)

"Liberty is often a heavy burden on a man. It involves the necessity of perpetual choice which is the kind of labor men have always dreaded." (36)

We've become an image-based, rather than a literate, society. But pictures and bumper sticker philosophies convey neither nuance nor context, wherein lie the difficult decisions of morality. We're unequipped to search for the truth or deal rationally with snowballing social and economic crises, so we search for security, certainty and order. And we're willing to use force to get it. And to force others to accept our version of it, especially anyone who looks, speaks or thinks differently. Democracy is useless to people who can't use its tools.

"Liberty cannot be preserved without a general knowledge among the people." (37)

A democratic and open society requires that we think for ourselves and come to our own conclusions, that we understand history, science and the difference between truth and lies. It also requires that we accept the fact that there are other ways to be besides our way.

These abilities are becoming extinct. They have all but have faded from view, like the oasis of democracy itself, merely a mirage manufactured as bait by the “opulent minority” and used as the front for its machinations.

And to this end, each of us was once “...encouraged to want to be king. ‘Success’ was measured by how close you came to fulfilling this kingly ambition. The ‘aristocracy’ (‘rule by the best,’ meaning the wealthiest) came to rule over mankind, with each man giving his consent to the arrangement. The cultivated desire to live like kings is the glue that bound the kingdom together, becoming the basis of the capitalist system.

The ‘aristocrats’ were a minority of individuals possessed of the desire to dominate and control all things within their grasp. And “...In order for the system to function, the majority” had to be equally “as willing to submit to the economic domination of the” “opulent minority” as the “opulent minority” were “determined to dominate them.” (38)

Corporate capitalism has always sought to stamp out our ability to make the important choices, both personal, and as a people. The “opulent minority” wants to make the important choices – like who gets what and how much. We, however, are “free” to choose from among nutritionless foodlike products, manly spectator sports and gas-guzzling vehicles, or elective plastic surgery and color-coordinated fingertip powder room towels. The fruit of this particular tree is selfish, consumer sadism, and contempt for those who can’t compete in the Consumer Bowl – the poor, the jobless, the ill and the disabled.

“The best index of a person’s character is a) how he treats people who can’t do him any good, and b) how he treats people who can’t fight back.” (39) And still, the “opulent minority” pretends not to know that there’s no honor in taking advantage when you already have it.

We have been brainwashed into believing that there is no alternative. But we can refuse to use. Or to be used. We can refuse to kill. Or to be killed. It is exactly this capacity for independent choice based on individual conscience, that little voice which **knows** right from wrong, that corporate capitalism seeks to destroy.

But in order to hear that little voice, we need to be able to connect the dots of all the particular trees and see them for the forest of corporate capitalism’s systemic oppression and exploitation that they are – which is necessary for its perpetuation. And making that connection is the only path to a meaningful life and personal freedom. As “Augustine wrote, hope has two beautiful daughters, anger and courage – anger at the way things are and the courage to see that they do not remain the way they are.” (40)

And as they rape democracy while draped in the flag, the repulsive modus operandi of the “opulent minority” is imploding on itself like the World Trade Center. Their fraud and corruption, exposed in the stark reality between their words and our lives, becomes more and more sickeningly apparent. The rage rising across the country will force them to employ even more aggressive forms of corporate power, doing away with the artifice and seduction of consumer society, opting for naked repression.

“The illusion of freedom will continue as long as it’s profitable to continue the illusion. At the point where the illusion becomes too expensive to maintain, they will just take down the scenery, pull back the curtains, and you will see the brick wall at the back of the theater.” (41)

The things that threaten minority rule via the corporate way of profit are exactly the tools of democracy for daily use that will break the empathy-proof outer shells of our corporate-purchased avatars/vehicles so we can speak driver-to-driver, no longer passengers relegated to the back of corporate capitalism's bus driven by the interests of the "opulent minority."

We can de-atomize the individual pain being inflicted on us by making the big picture visible, connecting the dots, seeing past the trees of the particular to the forest of class war by tracing its origin to the system of institutionalized inequality built on these trees – racism, sexism, agism, homophobia, xenophobia, religious fanaticism, economic or educational status, ideology, et al – in order to create it.

To make that forest visible we have to break the capitalist commandment to keep the personal separate from the societal and stop thinking of ourselves as John Wayne-Robinson Crusoe clones each one of us alone on an island with no one and nothing to relate to except our personal, material possessions and the personal responsibility for our resulting alienation, pain and depression, but not the responsibility for making any of the important choices which might alleviate that corporate-created pain and oppression. When you allow yourself to be isolated, the predator has the advantage and you become prey.

"What's wrong with this picture? 1) **Less than one half of a percent** of the total US population are passive claimants of economic wealth, who are also the most active daily participants in the democratic process. 2) The rest of us tend to be active daily participants in generating economic wealth, but we are also the most passive observers in the democratic process. We, the people, consent to this crippling arrangement every single day when we get out of bed and got to work and hand over most of the value (power) we produce to passive ownership." (42) (emphasis added)

The democratic process has to become an integral part of daily living in order to correct this imbalance because...

"...So long as the people do not care to exercise their freedom, those who wish to tyrannize will do so; for tyrants are active and ardent, and will devote themselves in the name of any number of gods, religious or otherwise, to put shackles upon sleeping men." (43) and... "He who does not know history is destined to remain a child." (44) subordinate by definition.

"Perhaps the claims of ideological purity and consistency on the part of the status quo's elite are mere marketing. Perhaps the members of this elite are committed to no ideology at all. Perhaps all they care about is their own self-interest. Perhaps they will espouse any position at all if they believe it will be profitable. Perhaps they are the proverbial progeny of Cain and the mark they bear is a capital S with a vertical line drawn through its center." (45)

Is this, finally, what it means to be king?

It always was, always will be and will always remains the same – unless the people stand together and fight **for** each other, not **with** each other. Everybody in. Nobody out. Because "if we do not hang together, will we most assuredly hang separately." (46)

"Enough is enough! ... For those who believe in freedom, the revolution calls you. For those who hate freedom for others, the revolution awaits you." (47)

"Those who make peaceful revolution impossible, make violent revolution inevitable." (48)

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