

Pay Attention to the Culture Wars...Never Mind Those Men Behind the Curtain

by Julian Sereno

Acrimony between the two major political parties has become the most divisive fault line in contemporary America — more than race, religion, gender. The Republicans and the Democrats, parties that have governed the United States for more than 150 years, are now incapable of cooperating on anything. Both attract the most zealous partisans, incapable of compromise; willing to commit calumny as they denounce opponents in the most personal ways imaginable.

Of course demonizing opponents is how they make money. Find an outrageous quote, or just make one up if you are Breitbart, put it in a fundraising letter, and throw it like red meat to the cultural warriors, right and left.

As this fascinating, appalling spectacle roils along, it is largely besides the point. It is a diversion, a dangerous one, but a diversion all the same.

What is really happening is the destruction of the middle class and the creation of an oligarchy. Over the past roughly 40 years, wealth of unprecedented proportions has been stripped from what was once the American middle class and seized by the wealthiest one percent. It began with the impoverishment of the Blue Collar middle class — the closing of old factories and the exporting of manufacturing

jobs, along with increasing use of automation and robots at home. Then it moved on to White Collar America, where computers continue to replace human beings. Whole categories of professions have been profoundly affected by computers, from accountants to travel agents.

The rich are getting richer. For 2016, CEOs in America's largest firms made an average of \$15.6 million, or 271 times the annual average pay of the typical worker. It didn't use to be this way. Compare that 271 to 1 ratio to 1965: 20 to 1; 1978: 30 to 1 or 1989: 59 to 1. Today's executives are plundering their companies to a degree that they make the Robber Barons of the Gilded Age look like penny anti cheapskates.

Meanwhile the lives of those that work for these companies gets meaner. It's the cutbacks in the ranks of employees that pays for executive loot. That means remaining employees have that much more work to do. Salaried workers with benefits are at the beck and call of management 24/7. The average work week in the 1970s was 40 hours, now it's nearly 50. Vacations are discouraged. When they burn-out, workers are dumped and replaced by new ones. Service workers, rarely paid a "living wage", have their shift hours assigned at the whim of computer algorithms designed to maximize profit.

American workers lead the world in productivity, but lag behind the other western democracies in wages, benefits, vacations, and, alarmingly, life expectancy.

Meanwhile, the poisonous political culture continues to polarize Americans.

Oligarchs such as the Koch Brothers, who created the American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC), the political scripture to which all Republican elected officials must swear fealty, spend hundreds of millions of dollars on national elections. George Soros, another oligarch, bankrolls liberal or progressive causes.

But most high rolling oligarchs who fund political causes and candidates remain anonymous, thanks to the Supreme Court. Its Citizens United decision gave corporations the same legal rights and human beings. It's defacto legalized bribery.

While these oligarchs are a diverse lot, they share commonality in their financial interests. That's why trade association lobbyists, who pay both political parties, have written much of the tax code being discussed at this very moment in the halls of power in Washington. By most unbiased accounts, if it passes the current tax legislation will offer great benefit to the rich and will leave the middle class high

and dry. It will add trillions to the deficit and the national debt.

They may disagree, but the Koch Brothers and George Soros have more in common with one another than they do with you and me. Ditto Warren Buffett and Mark Zuckerberg, Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton.

Culture Wars notwithstanding, there is a broad national consensus that crosses party lines on a variety of hot button issues, according to a number of public opinion polls. About marijuana (yes for medicinal purposes, maybe for recreation) abortion (yes early on, no later on) firearms (yes for background checks) on immigration (let the Dreamers stay). On the issue of LBGTQ rights, there has been great change toward acceptance, particularly in the past 10 years.

There is room for compromise and progress on all sorts of divisive issues. But don't count on our elected officials ever facing up to them. They owe their allegiance to the oligarchs who fund them, not to the voters who elect them.

They who fund them own them.

Julian Sereno is editor and publisher of Chatham County Line.

Baby Boomer Report Card

by Don Lein

As we look back over the last half-century we wonder what we did to deserve today's entertainment industry, sports industry, media and universities. How did we evolve from a Frank Capra, John Wayne, Jimmy Stewart industry to one with Harvey Weinstains, Kevin Spaceys and Charley Sheens; from Roger Staubachs to Colin Kaepernicks; from a truly independent Gray Lady to today's leftist advocacy publication; from prestigious universities that were bastions of free speech to politically correct havens who foreclose any contradictory speech and whose degrees are no longer guarantors of knowledge or critical thinking.

The sixties began when JFK, a true war hero, succeeded Eisenhower, himself, a war hero who had presided over eight years of post WW II recovery. There was the Korean conflict, which has slipped into historical insignificance, except for episodes of MASH. JFK was purportedly the first president with an STD. He would routinely have his secret service agents bring in prostitutes for his nightly romps. On occasion, with celebrities, like Marilyn Monroe, he would invite his brother RFK for a manage a trois. LBJ, JFK's successor, opined on JFK's peccadillos that he had slept with more women by accident than JFK had by design. Such was the moral leadership in the White House in the 1960s.

Is it any wonder that the youth in the 1960s rejected the sexual mores of their predecessors and engaged in hook-up sex/Woodstocks/communes/drugs?? When LBJ stumbled into the Vietnam War, is it any wonder that a sizable part of this generation refused to give up their lifestyles to serve

their country — a number of them went to Canada, rather than serve. Demonstrations on campuses were routine up until the mandatory draft was dropped, whereupon peace returned to the ivies. This sexual revolution would forever change our country — while hook-up sex was in some ways liberating it also could be demeaning to the female partner — Woodstock was fun and games, but not as liberating as expected and often led to harassment and female degradation.

While JFK/LBJ oversaw the sexual revolution they also oversaw what LBJ characterized as the "N*****" problem — MLK, Rosa Parks, et. al. The result was the passage of the "Great Society" legislation about which LBJ commented to two governors "I'll have those N*****s voting Democrat for the next 200 years." Indeed, other than a few exceptions the African American community has largely supported Democrats since that time, even as the African American family has disintegrated, crime rates in those communities have soared, government schools have gone from bad to worse and poverty is widespread. This is quite surprising since the first African American leaders — Harriet Tubman, Frederick Douglass, et. al., were all Republican.

What is the explanation for the African American community abandoning its American roots; Hollywood/the arts losing their way; sports abandoning its prime goal of athletic excellence; the media sermonizing rather than objectively reporting; universities abandoning free expression for political correctness? They have abandoned their unique societal roles to join in the same mindless blandness that political correctness

requires, to wit, being ideologically in tune with political correctness would bring more dividends than would knowledge, foresight or industry. Instead of fulfilling their original mission they feel they can sermonize and insult their patrons

Twenty-four hundred years ago during the civil war on Corcyra, Thucydides opined that in order to mask the ill intent of some particularly unpopular political agendas, word's meanings had to change for the agendas to become publicly acceptable. George Orwell used this technique in both Animal Farm and 1984. Today's examples are "safe spaces", which equates to segregation, "affirmative action" which means implicit racial quotas, "trigger warnings" equates to censorship, with "diversity" equating to orthodoxy in thought and expression.

We are legitimately reaping what we have sown. Our Baby Boomers became the most affluent and most leisured generation in history, but instead of developing competence and leadership, they developed hubris — instead of leading, they lectured; instead of reporting facts they gave us conclusions; instead of entertaining us, they sermonized. They used terms like Watergate without knowing its history or context, just as they use Ferguson without understanding the fraud and fantasies Eric Holder's Justice Department found.

Fortunately for us, our cultural and financial elites are primarily a coastal group and will continue to marginalize themselves — so hope still remains that the Boomers will get a passing grade.

Don Lein is a regular contributor to Chatham County Line. A Chatham resident, he is involved in a variety of civic organizations.

State-Sanctioned Chemical Dependency

by Jeff Davidson

The "war" on drugs, more precisely chemical dependency, will never be won: Marijuana is legal in Colorado and several other states. What's little known is that 87 percent of Colorado sales are generated from the heaviest smokers. These are people who light up 21 to 31 days per month, based on a study by the Marijuana Policy Group. Think about that for a moment: seven out of eight Colorado marijuana buyers smoke anywhere from two out of three days, to three out of three days.

RIDING HIGH

Is this what the law intended, to enable people to be perpetually high? Perhaps those same buyers continually have been high for years, buying pot when it was illegal to do so. Do most heavy pot smokers have the funds to maintain their habit? How many of them are deep in debt?

Of those who smoke everyday of the week, how many smoke multiple times per day? How many heavy smokers are in professions that require their full mental faculties? Are they involved in more accidents on the road? Do they populate hospital emergency rooms to a greater degree than the typical person? How many are parents? Do their children know what they do? Is anybody researching and reporting on these issues?

DRINK UP

And what about another major intoxicant, state-sanctioned? In the alcohol industry, of adults above age 18 — the top 10 percent of drinkers, roughly equal to 24 million people — average about 74 drinks per week. In other words, these people average 10+ drinks per day. Such customers are vital to industry revenues, accounting for more than 50 percent of all alcohol sales in any given month or year.

Few people advocate that the U.S. return to prohibition. Nevertheless, here is a second, regulated industry where

chemical dependence fuels revenues. Is this what our legislators had in mind? Is it healthy for society to have 24 million out of 240 million adults averaging 10 drinks per day? How many of them are parents? How many work in professions that require sobriety? What percentage of industrial accidents can be attributed to problem drinkers?

To what degree do heavy drinkers live long and fruitful lives? Do they account for more emergency room visits? Do they account for more relationship breakups or family breakups? Do they drive up the cost of health insurance?

How many don't have the finances to engage in that amount of drinking, yet dispense their funds anyway?

CONSUMPTION ASSUMPTIONS

Do you suppose the industry has any interest in reducing the consumption of these problem drinkers? Are any effective education programs in force? Occasionally, you'll encounter a public service message from an alcohol manufacturer or distributor, admonishing the masses to "drink responsibly." Yet they know that 10% of their target market, which accounts for more than 50% of their sales, does not drink responsibly.

Once a company, let alone an entire industry, reaps huge profits from high-volume, repeat users, it's exceedingly tempting to not turn those users away or, at the least, encourage them to indulge a bit less.

Jeff Davidson of Raleigh is a regular contributor to Chatham County Line. He is "The Work-Life Balance Expert", the premier thought leader on work-life balance issues, Jeff is the author of 65 books, among them Breathing Space, Dial it Down, Live it Up, Simpler Living, 60 Second Innovator, and 60 Second Organizer. Visit www.BreathingSpace.com

VETERANS

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first official use in America was the Seminole Wars. In the Civil War, Gen. Grant spoke of Union troops killing Southern bloodhounds, and "Tinker" helped guide blockade runners in North Carolina. Dogs (e.g., Sergeant Stubby, WWI; Chips, WWII; Cairo, with the Navy SEALs in the operation in which Osama bin Laden was killed) have been famous in our major wars. They have served in various capacities and under such different names as MWD's (Military Working Dogs), police dogs, and K-9's. When retired, they often become therapy dogs. [If allergies are a problem, we will seek a trainer's story.]

Burlington Mayor Ian Baltutis and I were the principal speakers for TVAB's 2017 Veterans Day Program, and I gave a version of this column. I also prepared the formal program and included the service dog information, with pictures, in it.

For more information on Leonidas Stevens, Jr., see Charles M. Ingram, <http://www.ncpedia.org/biography/stevens-jr-leonidas-jr>, reprinted by permission in Footnotes, Journal of the Duplin County Historical Society, Ed. Dr. Lynn Veach Sadler.

Dr. Lynn Veach Sadler, of Burlington's The Village at Brookwood, a former college president, is widely published in academics and creative writing and works as a writer and an editor. As Central Region Gilbert-Chappell Distinguished Poet 2013-2015, she mentored student and adult poets.

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