

PIQUE

Newsletter of the Secular Humanist Society of New York

September 8, 2020

If we're not going to work, is Monday still a holiday? Let's say so, as we lead this week with some not-so-subtle historical comparisons to youknowwho, then fact-check crime in the ("Democrat") cities and bigotry in the burbs. We take on credentialism and cisheteropatriarchy (real things, really), offer just a teensy of praise to Big Pharma, turn to the funnies for wisdom about stupidity while we suggest serious standards for cops, smackdown a snotnose new right-wing "hero", announce shocking news from Fox and, of course, toss Trump's latest word salad and his weekly moral atrocity. —JR

**ENJOY THE LABOR DAY WEEKEND,
THANKS TO EVERY WORKER
WHO EVER CARRIED A UNION CARD**



**SOUND FAMILIAR?
Jonathan Engel**

On Thursday, August 27, the Arts section of the *New York Times* contained a review by Jennifer Szalai of Volker Ullrich's book, *Hitler: Downfall, 1939-1945*. The review stuck to the book at hand, and made no allusions or references to current times.

However, here are some excerpts from the review, which was entitled "The Lethal Final Years of a Liar, Tyrant, and Braggart":

"The impulsiveness and grandiosity, the bullying and vulgarity, were obvious from the beginning; if anything, they accounted for Adolf Hitler's anti-establishment appeal."

"But anyone who thought the Nazis would be content with their share—that Hitler would rise to the occasion or be hemmed in by it, becoming a dignified statesman who sought compromise—was summarily purged by the system that conservatives assumed they controlled."

"Hitler was shrewd about seizing power, but he was too restless and reckless to govern."

"I have overcome the chaos in Germany, restored order and hugely increased productivity in all areas of our national economy," he bragged to the Reichstag, even as the actual situation was considerably less stellar than he proclaimed."

"At first, Hitler's standard approach—lying, blaming others and launching surprise attack—made for a successful wartime strategy."

"Hitler was who he was – the question became what the people around him were willing to do about it. The military commanders who voiced no objections to the Polish invasion balked when Hitler decided to go to war with the West, reassuring one another that they were determined to 'put the brakes' on any disaster that was unfolding. But they were all intention and no action."

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“To read *Downfall* is to see up close how Hitler lashed out—compulsively, destructively—whenever he felt boxed in. He had the instinct of a crude social Darwinist who also liked to gamble, experiencing the world only in terms of winning and losing.”

“Hitler sometimes suggested he would be sated by exclusion and exploitation. ‘We will construct a gigantic wall separating Asia from Europe,’ he promised.”

“Hitler was a scattershot, undisciplined leader, prone to tardiness and meandering monologues.”

“As Ullrich points out, Hitler never gave a written order to exterminate the Jews, because he didn’t need to: He preferred to traffic in generalities instead of specifics, verbally making his wishes known so that his careerist minions could figure out the rest. ‘Part of his style of rule was to blur areas of responsibility and encourage rivalries to remind everyone concerned of his position as the sole arbiter’... It was a method that allowed Hitler to feed his vanity while also preserving the option to deflect any blame onto others.”

“By 1941, Ullrich writes, Germany’s defeat was already assured, but Hitler would have none of it, getting rid of any military experts who challenged him.”

“Goebbels treated the Germans like chumps to be duped. ‘There are so many lies that truth and swindle can scarcely be distinguished’.”

“The truth did emerge in the end, but only after years of mass death and cataclysmic destruction.”

Draw your own conclusions.

VIOLENCE AND DANGER? WHERE?

Libby Anne

(Excerpted from “*Actually, Red States Are the Most Violent at Love, Joy, Feminism, on patheos.com, 9/1/2020*”)

“There is violence and danger in the streets of many Democrat-run cities throughout America ... A lot of people are looking at what’s happening to these Democrat-run cities and they’re disgusted ... Leave Democrat cities. Let them rot.” – Donald J. Trump in his nomination-acceptance speech and in Kenosha, Wisconsin

If you listen to the president, you’d probably think blue cities like Chicago have the highest murder rates in the country. Because I’m not absent from the media ecosystem, I assumed that was true for a hot moment. Sure, I would also tell you in a heartbeat that these large blue cities’ high murder rates were the result of a variety of factors, and that what these cities needed was better investment in jobs, schools, housing, and community programs, not more policing. But still! For a moment there, I forgot that these cities don’t actually have the highest murder rate.

Chicago only has the highest murder rate in the country if you look solely at the most populous cities and exclude all others. And even then, in a list of the 100 most populous cities in the U.S., Chicago is actually 10th on the list, after cities like Memphis, Tennessee, and Cleveland, Ohio. When you widen the net to look at all cities, the list of cities with higher murder rates than Chicago’s grows. Saginaw,

Michigan. Jackson, Mississippi. Pine Bluff, Arkansas.

The effect is even bigger when you look at other categories of crime. Which cities have the highest rates of property crime? Middletown, Ohio. Miami Beach, Florida. Springfield, Missouri. Albuquerque, New Mexico. Burglary? Monroe, Louisiana. Santa Fe, New Mexico. Flint, Michigan. Cleveland, Ohio. Car theft? Irvington, New Jersey. Yakima, Washington. Richmond, California. Albuquerque, New Mexico.

A look at the violent crime rate by state certainly doesn’t suggest that blue states are more violent than red states. To the contrary.

Using 2018 data, the most violent states, in order, are Delaware, Louisiana, Missouri, Alaska, Maryland, New Mexico, Alabama, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Arkansas. If there is a pattern, it is that most of these states are in the U.S. South. States in New England, in contrast, are all at the bottom of the list. ...

It’s almost like violent crime rates are related to a variety of factors including things like poverty rates and cultural norms about violence and the resolution of conflict. It’s almost like crime should be treated fundamentally as a sociological reality and not as a political football. It’s almost like we live in a country with a fascist government that is more interested in using propaganda to scare people than it is in solving problems.

GREENWICH BIGOTRY FINDS A HOME ON FACEBOOK

David Rafferty

(Reprinted from *Greenwich Time*, 8/28/2020)

So there was this break-in, a liquor store robbery in Stamford earlier this month. Or maybe there wasn’t. Maybe it was a smash-and-grab attack, maybe it was looting, or maybe it was just vandalism.

Or maybe it was none of those things, because maybe it didn’t happen at all. Maybe it was an urban legend, something overheard in conversation, or a rumor discussed around the virtual water cooler. Or maybe it was a targeted provocation, manufactured out of thin air. Maybe the story was shared online to trigger his followers, to show how clever the author is, or possibly even as a joke.

Or maybe, this story was all of the above. A concocted fabrication designed to denigrate people of color with sly, plausibly deniable innuendo which the author would then likely claim was just a misinterpreted joke, all while stirring up the racist bile of his online friends who took the bait.

Throughout this horrible summer of discontent, Greenwich hasn’t been immune from the shock of confrontations with respected neighbors and friends who decide it’s OK to vent their racist musings in public. From gin-soaked offensive admissions overheard at outdoor restaurants to “What did you just say?” double-takes in our backyard quarantine pod parties, it’s probably a good thing we’re staying six feet away from each other. Online however, that’s where our offensiveness really shines through.

CREDENTIALISM: ACCEPTABLE PREJUDICE

Michael J. Sandel

(Excerpted from "Disdain for the Less Educated Is the Last Acceptable Prejudice" New York Times OpEd, 9/2/2020, and forwarded by Charles Heller)

Joe Biden has a secret weapon in his bid for the presidency: He is the first Democratic nominee in 36 years without a degree from an Ivy League university.

This is a potential strength. One of the sources of Donald Trump's political appeal has been his ability to tap into resentment against meritocratic elites. By the time of Mr. Trump's election, the Democratic Party had become a party of technocratic liberalism more congenial to the professional classes than to the blue-collar and middle-class voters who once constituted its base. In 2016, two-thirds of whites without a college degree voted for Mr. Trump, while Hillary Clinton won more than 70 percent of voters with advanced degrees.

Being untainted by the Ivy League credentials of his predecessors may enable Mr. Biden to connect more readily with the blue-collar workers the Democratic Party has struggled to attract in recent years. More important, this aspect of his candidacy should prompt us to reconsider the meritocratic political project that has come to define contemporary liberalism.

At the heart of this project are two ideas: First, in a global, technological age, higher education is the key to upward mobility, material success and social esteem. Second, if everyone has an equal chance to rise, those who land on top deserve the rewards their talents bring.

This way of thinking is so familiar that it seems to define the American dream. But it has come to dominate our politics only in recent decades. And despite its inspiring promise of success based on merit, it has a dark side.

Building a politics around the idea that a college degree is a precondition for dignified work and social esteem has a corrosive effect on democratic life. It devalues the contributions of those without a diploma, fuels prejudice against less-educated members of society, effectively excludes most working people from elective government and provokes political backlash.

Here is the basic argument of mainstream political opinion, especially among Democrats, that dominated in the decades leading up to Mr. Trump and the populist revolt he came to represent: A global economy that outsources jobs to low-wage countries has somehow come upon us and is here to stay. The central political question is not how to change it but how to adapt to it, to alleviate its devastating effect on the wages and job prospects of workers outside the charmed circle of elite professionals.

The answer: Improve the educational credentials of workers so that they, too, can "compete and win in the global economy". Thus, the way to contend with inequality is to encourage upward mobility through higher education.

It is important to remember that most Americans — nearly two-thirds — do not have a four-year college degree. By telling workers that their inadequate education is the

Most visibly, Greenwich made news recently when a Greenwich Emergency Medical Services employee thought writing his intolerant stupidity on Facebook was a good idea. And since the entire point of Facebook posts is to accumulate likes and comments, he was rewarded with feedback from a town employee, seconding his intolerance. Both gentlemen have since been disciplined by their employers, either appropriately or inappropriately depending on your point of view, case closed, and hopefully this will never, ever happen in town again.

Sigh.

Of course it was going to happen again.

The following is a verbatim Facebook post from two weeks ago, written by a prominent, well-regarded Greenwichite with a significant local online "Friend" list, including many noteworthy public and private persons of fine reputation.

"I went into a Stamford liquor store yesterday with a smashed window to gain entry through..... i asked "what did they take?" He said "Hennessy." I said "I would have taken Don Perignon.... or or Chrystal" he laughed."

For those who don't know, Hennessy is a cognac, which over the years has become synonymous with the brand's major consumers, African-Americans and other people of color. Targeting the upscale, urban Black community between the world wars, cognac in general and Hennessy in particular gave POC an alternative to American whiskey, which was generally branded and marketed with Old South and Confederate imagery. Today, many ignorant people naturally only see Hennessy as a part of their narrow-minded, gangster hip-hop vision of Black Americans, rather than as a marketing success story. In this case, "Hennessy" becomes incredibly unsubtle racist code that if it was cognac that was stolen, the perpetrators must be Black.

So it should come as no surprise that the author's "Friends", local neighbors and people you meet every day, were more than happy to confirm their ignorance and sink to the occasion. They played along with the game of demonizing POC, but without fully committing, so if called out later they'll say, "I was just joking" when they made comments like these:

"So the description of the robber has been made then."

"Who knew Hennessy is considered 'reparations.'"

"Good grief. Was that owner trying to say that Hennessey drinkers are some sort of stereotype when he chuckled? AOC told me they're just trying to get money for food."

"BLM peaceful movement??"

Meanwhile, there's no police record of this alleged incident in Stamford and when asked, the author declined to provide additional details.

So was it real, a joke or just deliberately loathsome? What does it matter? Through their comments the small-minded get to indulge their prejudices and bigotry without consequence, while the silent are complicit for not speaking out. I've written before that collectively, Greenwich is better than garbage like this. From now through Election Day and beyond, we are going to have to start proving it.

reason for their troubles, meritocrats moralize success and failure and unwittingly promote credentialism – an insidious prejudice against those who do not have college degrees. ...

Beyond revealing the disparaging views that college-educated elites have of less-educated people, the study also found that elites are unembarrassed by this prejudice. They may denounce racism and sexism, but they are unapologetic about their negative attitudes toward the less educated.

By the 2000s, citizens without a college degree were not only looked down upon; in the United States and Western Europe, they were also virtually absent from elective office. In the U.S. Congress, 95 percent of House members and 100 percent of senators are college graduates. The credentialed few govern the uncredentialed many. ...

Some might argue that government by well-educated university graduates is something to welcome, not regret. Surely we want well-trained doctors to perform our appendectomies. Aren't highly credentialed leaders best equipped to give us sound public policies and reasoned political discourse?

Not necessarily. Even a glance at the parlous state of political discourse in Congress should give us pause. Governing well requires not only technocratic expertise but also civic virtue – an ability to deliberate about the common good and to identify with citizens from all walks of life. But history suggests little correlation between the capacity for political judgment and the ability to win admission to elite universities. The notion that “the best and the brightest” are better at governing than their less-credentialed fellow citizens is a myth born of meritocratic hubris.

If the rhetoric of rising and the reign of technocratic merit have led us astray, how might we recast the terms of moral and political aspiration? We should focus less on arming people for a meritocratic race and more on making life better for those who lack a diploma but who make important contributions to our society – through the work they do, the families they raise and the communities they serve. This requires renewing the dignity of work and putting it at the center of our politics.

It also requires reconsidering the meaning of success and questioning our meritocratic hubris: Is it my doing that I have the talents that society happens to prize – or is it my good luck?

Appreciating the role of luck in life can prompt a certain humility: There, but for an accident of birth, or the grace of God, or the mystery of fate, go I. This spirit of humility is the civic virtue we need now. It is the beginning of the way back from the harsh ethic of success that drives us apart. It points beyond the tyranny of merit toward a less rancorous, more generous public life.

Humanism believes that the individual attains the good life by harmoniously combining personal satisfactions and continuous self-development with significant work and other activities that contribute to the welfare of the community. – *Corliss Lamont*

FIGHT THE CISHETEROPATRIARCHY!

Bret Stephens

(Excerpted from “Unwitting Progressives for Trump”, OpEd in The New York Times, 8/31/2020)

As Donald Trump was about to accept the Republican nomination from the South Lawn of the White House with warnings that “No one will be safe in Biden’s America”, National Public Radio was doing its small part to make sure the president would be re-elected.

NPR’s assistance in this matter was surely unwitting. But that doesn’t make it any less effective.

The assist came in the form of a lengthy interview by NPR’s Natalie Escobar with Vicky Osterweil, author of *In Defense of Looting*. The book makes the case for looting because it “attacks some of the core beliefs and structures of cisheteropatriarchal racial capitalist society”; “rejects the legitimacy of ownership rights and property”; and “reveals all these for what they are: not natural facts, but social constructs benefiting a few at the expense of the many, upheld by ideology, economy and state violence”.

To judge by the NPR interview, *In Defense of Looting* is not an interesting book. It speaks for almost nobody beyond the fringe left – and certainly not for looters who hadn’t thought about “cisheteropatriarchalism”. The fact that the publisher is an imprint of the international conglomerate Hachette (2018 revenues, approximately \$2.7 billion) compounds foolishness with hypocrisy.

ABOUT THAT 17 YEAR-OLD KILLER IN KENOSHA, THE RIGHT’S NEW HERO

Trevor Noah

(From “The Daily Show with Trevor Noah”, 8/27/2020)

Some guy [Kyle Rittenhouse] decided to drive to Kenosha with his militia buddies to “protect a business”, and apparently ended up shooting three people and killing two. But don’t worry – the business is okay. And let me tell you something: No one drives into a city with guns because they love someone else’s business that much. That’s some bullshit. No one has ever thought, “Oh, it’s my solemn duty to pick up a rifle and protect that T. J. Maxx.” They do it because they’re hoping to shoot someone.

That’s the only reason people like him join these gangs in the first place. And yes, I said it: a gang. Enough with this “militia” bullshit, this isn’t the Battle of Yorktown, it’s a bunch of dudes threatening people with guns. And while what happened with those shootings last night is tragic, what happened afterwards is illuminating. Because it made me wonder, it really made me wonder why some people get shot seven times in the back while other people are treated like human beings and reasoned with and taken into custody with no bullets in their bodies.

How come Jacob Blake was seen as a deadly threat for a *theoretical* gun that he *might* have and *might* try to commit a crime with, but this gunman who was armed and had already shot people, who had shown that he is a threat, was arrested the next day, given full due process of the law, and

generally treated like a human being whose life matters?

How did Dylan Roof shoot up a church, James Holmes shoot up a movie theater, and both live to tell about it? Why is it police decide some threats must be extinguished immediately while others get the privilege of being defused?

I'm asking these as questions, but I feel like we know the answer. The answer is that the gun doesn't matter as much as who is holding the gun. Because for some people, Black skin is the most threatening weapon of all.

WHAT SHOULD BE REQUIRED OF ALL LAW ENFORCEMENT OFFICERS (LEOs)

(Posted on Facebook by Charles Heller)

- Associate or Bachelor's Degree in Criminal Justice.
- National Certification Exam (CE).
- Mandatory licensure in the state they are employed in, renewed at the LEO's expense every two years.
- Mandatory CEs every two years on the use of force, de-escalation, constitutional law, sexual assault, racism, more.
- Loss of LEO license for misconduct, drug use, DUI, etc.

Does that seem like a lot?

Every nurse you know is held to those standards.

ONLY TRUMP COULD MAKE BIG PHARMA LOOK GOOD ... BY COMPARISON

John Rafferty

The Trump administration has committed billions of dollars to mass-produce coronavirus vaccines ahead of their approval by the FDA so they can be made widely available quickly. Wide distribution could begin by year's end if one or more is approved.

But the now politically-compromised Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has notified states to plan for vaccine distribution as early as late October, sparking concern that political considerations would result in a premature approval of an unproven inoculation.

So, if you can't trust the Trumpsters, trust us. That's the implication of an agreement several coronavirus vaccine developers, including Pfizer and Moderna, are reportedly working on. Three of the firms told the *New York Times* that despite pressure to produce a vaccine before the Nov. 3 presidential election, they'll promise not to release immunizations before they're proven safe and effective.

And yes, I'd trust Big Pharma - I'd trust *anybody* - before I'd trust the Liar in Chief.

WHY DO WE BELIEVE THE ATLANTIC MAGAZINE'S ANONYMOUS SOURCES?

John Rafferty

Because Trump calling American soldiers killed in combat "losers" and "suckers" ... because Trump's refusal to visit a French cemetery where American marines are buried because rain might muss his hairdo ... because Trump barring disabled and amputee veterans from his planned Mussolini-style military parade ... are all exactly what we expect of him.

ON AUGUST 27, WHEN ASKED WHAT HIS PLAN IS FOR THE NEXT FOUR YEARS, THE VERY STABLE GENIUS SAID:

I think, I think it would be, I think it would be very, very, I think we have a very, very solid, we would continue what we're doing, and we have other things on our plate."

APPARENTLY, THERE'S MORE THAN ONE PLAGUE

Stephan Pastis

(From the "Pearls Before Swine" comic strip, 8/30/2020)

Mouse: Oh, great Wise Ass On The Hill, how do we rid ourselves of the pandemic that plagues us?

Wise Ass On The Hill: We must all read more. Not your Facebook news feed, but good books that inform and enlighten. And pay for local journalism, because if you don't, it will go away. And strive to be informed, actually informed, instead of only seeking information that conforms to your world view.

Mouse: And this will end Covid-19?

Wise Ass On The Hill: Covid-19? I thought we were talking about stupidity.

NATION SHOCKED TO LEARN OF POSSIBLE BIAS AT FOX NEWS

Andy Borowitz

NEW YORK (The Borowitz Report)—Millions of Americans were stunned and incredulous on Monday after learning of a possible incident of bias at Fox News Channel.

At a time when so many American institutions have been under attack, the possibility that Fox, one of the nation's most respected news organizations, might be susceptible to hidden agendas was too much for many to take.

In interviews across the country, Fox viewers expressed disappointment, confusion, and shock that a news network known for its exacting standards had imperilled its hard-earned reputation for fairness.

"I'm devastated by this," Carol Foyler, a viewer from Scottsdale, Arizona, said. "If we can't trust Fox News, who can we trust?"

Tracy Klugian, a viewer from Akron, Ohio, said that he had been "walking around in a state of disbelief" since he learned of possible bias at the network. "I'm trying to be strong, but it's tough," he said. "I know I speak for a lot of people when I say that today was the day that America lost its innocence."

But some Fox viewers, like Harland Dorrinson, of Topeka, Kansas, warned of a "rush to judgment" against Fox, urging people to remember the network's stellar record of journalistic accomplishments.

"Whenever there was a national emergency, whether it was Benghazi, Hillary's e-mails, or Obama's birth certificate, Fox News was there," he said. "One little mistake doesn't wash all that away."

