

1: How to Confront a Crisis of Cultural Confidence » Mosaic

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Share via Email President Barack Obama is likely to face difficulty passing progressive legislation after the November elections. President Barack Obama will lose any hope for passing progressive legislation aimed at helping the poor or the environment. Indeed, all major legislation and reforms are likely to be stalemated until , following a new presidential election. An already bad situation marked by deadlock and vitriol is likely to worsen, and the world should not expect much leadership from a bitterly divided United States. Much of America is in a nasty mood and the language of compassion has more or less been abandoned. Both political parties serve their rich campaign contributors, while proclaiming they defend the middle class. The Republican party recently issued a " Pledge to America " to explain its beliefs and campaign promises. It is also filled with propaganda. A quote from President John F Kennedy states that high tax rates can strangle the economy, but Kennedy was speaking half a century ago, when the top marginal tax rates were twice what they are today. Most of all, the Republican platform is devoid of compassion. America today presents the paradox of a rich country falling apart because of the collapse of its core values. American productivity is among the highest in the world. Yet the country is in the throes of an ugly moral crisis. Income inequality is at historic highs, but the rich claim they have no responsibility to the rest of society. They refuse to come to the aid of the destitute, and defend tax cuts at every opportunity. Almost everybody complains, almost everybody aggressively defends their own narrow, short-term interests, and almost everybody abandons any pretense of looking ahead or addressing the needs of others. Americans seem to believe that they have a natural right to government services without paying taxes. In the American political lexicon, taxes are defined as a denial of liberty. There was a time, not long ago, when Americans talked of ending poverty at home and abroad. America in the s enacted programs to rebuild poor communities, to fight air and water pollution, and to ensure healthcare for the elderly. Then the deep divisions over Vietnam and civil rights, combined with a surge of consumerism and advertising, seemed to end an era of shared sacrifice for the common good. For 40 years, compassion in politics receded. Ronald Reagan gained popularity by cutting social benefits for the poor claiming the poor cheated to receive extra payments. Today, no politician even dares to mention help for poor people. The big campaign contributors to both parties pay to ensure their vested interests dominate political debates. That means both parties increasingly defend the interests of the rich, though Republicans do so slightly more than Democrats. Even a modest tax increase on the rich is unlikely to find support in American politics. The result of all this is likely to be a long-term decline of US power and prosperity, because Americans no longer invest collectively in their common future. America will remain a rich society for a long time to come, but one that is increasingly divided and unstable. Fear and propaganda may lead to more US-led international wars , as in the past decade. And what is happening in America is likely to be repeated elsewhere. America is vulnerable to social breakdown because it is a highly diverse society. Racism and anti-immigrant sentiments are an important part of the attack on the poor " or at least the reason why so many are willing to heed the propaganda against helping the poor. As other societies grapple with their own increasing diversity, they may follow the US into crisis. Swedes recently gave enough votes to a rightwing, anti-immigrant party to give it representation in parliament, reflecting a growing backlash against the rising number of immigrants in Swedish society. Both examples show that Europe, like the US, is vulnerable to the politics of division, as our societies become more ethnically diverse. The lesson from America is that economic growth is no guarantee of wellbeing or political stability. American society has become increasingly harsh, where the richest Americans buy their way to political power and the poor are abandoned to their fate. In their private lives, Americans have become addicted to consumerism, which drains their time, savings, attention and inclination to engage in acts of collective compassion. The world should beware. Unless we break the ugly trends of big money in politics and rampant consumerism, we risk winning economic productivity at the price of our humanity.

2: America's moral crisis | The Disorder Of Things

*Confronting America's Moral Crisis [Thomas Hauser] on www.enganchecubano.com *FREE* shipping on qualifying offers. Discusses current moral situation in the U.S.*

He is currently writing a book on the historical sociology of the long nineteenth century. Europeans may have looked on anxiously at how the pressures of a brutalised capitalism and great power politics appeared to have toxified a deeply polarised American public debate. But with their own countries facing similar, if not even more egregious, rise in racial populism, they were hardly in a position to judge. For many Americans world events had distilled a clearer sense in their own minds of who they were and who they strived to be. In New York, a large crowd gathered on the evening of the 18th May convinced that they were on the cusp of a new dawn of American greatness. An aspiring presidential hopeful spoke to their passions. We found the need of awakening, and the republic awakened. We found the growing peril and overwhelmed it with patriotism. We saw the need of dedication and consecration and we dedicated and consecrated. We came to realise that no nation could survive half loyal and half disloyal, and we declared loyalty to the Republic. We saw as never saw before that privileges and advantages of American citizenship call for the duties and devotions of that citizenship, and it was proclaimed by the conscience of the Republic that every man who fattens his existence on American opportunity must be an American in his heart and soul. The United States is per cent American today, and we mean to hold it so henceforth and forever. The audience was the American Defense Society, a far right nationalist organisation formed in to agitate for American entry into the Great War. But while this might suggest a gathering of interest to only a small current of American society, the event was no fringe affair. On that evening in May the speaker was one Warren Harding, a Republican who saw himself as a fervent patriot totally committed to the ideal of America, and who would soon become the 29th president of the United States. For Harding America had been unduly benevolent towards its rivals when it slashed its customs tariff in This idealistic opening to the world threatened, he believed, the inner sanctum and commercial vitality of American life. He promised to oppose it at all costs. But this ignores how he was an explicit advocate of foreign intervention. He merely criticised the construction of a liberal international order that he saw as limiting the freedom of America to forcefully prosecute its own interests. It is more accurate to see Harding as part of a self-consciously colonial tradition in American politics, which had evolved from the belief in American Manifest Destiny at home through to the annexations seen in the wars with Spain and the Philippines abroad. For this tradition, which famously counts amongst its number Theodore Roosevelt , having perfected a system of governance with no equivalent on the global stage, the American people were duty bound to expand, by force if needed, the territories under its jurisdiction and build a powerful national force in the world. For his part, Harding appeared to see no limits to American expansionism. He called for the full annexation of Cuba in No other course could have succeeded. He believed nations required strong leaders and countries ruled by individuals with a sense of the national purpose should be respected, perhaps even admired. As his speech to the American Defense Society illustrated all too well, Harding was prepared to coquet with organisations that took these inclinations to quite an extreme. Trump evidently was not, but was happy to accept this description: We were the big bully, but we were not smartly led. And we were the big bully who was " the big stupid bully and we were systematically ripped off by everybody. It summarised something fundamental about his whole approach to the global order. American labor will never consent. We must have protection to hold us to what we are, and send us to greater eminence. A cosmopolitanism that Trumpists associate with increased flows of people, capital and goods across borders is seen as an existential threat to an imagined sense of what America is and should be. Political scientists will inevitably ask what type of sociological context might be liable to produce this popular backlash against a liberal economic order. And, while all situations are contingent and unique, it is undoubtedly the case that some parallels with the world that Harding inhabited and the globalised order of the twenty-first century can be cautiously observed. For the two decades prior to the First World War were a period of relative trade liberalisation and rapid social change, profoundly recasting the economic and cultural geography of the United States. This period has often been

seen as an explicit precursor to the free market globalisation of today. The relationship between the economic base and nationalism is, however, inevitably complex. Harding had a vision of the look and feel of American society that was nationally homogenous and aggressively strong in the world. This imaginary of the future he presented to citizens cannot be reduced to certain interests or economic pressures. It was culturally created by an array of historical causes. Just as Harding heaped praise on Porfirio Diaz, Trump offers Putin warm words and implied support, even as the usual zealots of the national interest warn of his grave threat to American security. Amongst radical nationalists the strongman, it seems, has a persistent appeal, defying all logic. The meaning of this appeal to national fidelity was eminently context dependent. Not content with this apparent encouragement of a political assassination on American soil, in the second presidential debate he pledged to throw Hilary Clinton in jail if elected. Trump may not propose the annexation of Mexico. The building of the wall is, of course, the concluding point of a wider vocabulary of racism that has condemned Hispanics as rapists and called for an end to Muslim immigration. Harding believed that through a sense of patriotic duty and authoritarian promotion of the national spirit diverse cultures could be assimilated into the American way of life. While this was hardly the epitome of liberal progressivism, it appears to be the case that Trump offers a much more explicitly racialized image of the American nation. It does not venture any predictions for the future. But plainly within American society there is a deep sense of a country suffering a severe moral crisis where fear and suspicious have broken febrile bonds of trust and community. A social contract that has long been strained by the reality of neoliberal insecurity is surely at its crisis point. Perhaps it is this breakdown of trust in the order of American society that has catalysed the candidature of someone willing to breach every imaginable moral code. Whatever the outcome on the 8th November the fires of ethnic nationalism ignited so energetically over the course of this campaign will be extremely difficult to put out. It is difficult to escape the conclusion that America, and Western societies more generally, may be on the cusp of a whole new era of moral and political regression. Ohio State University Press , chapter Ohio State University Press , pp. Moffat Yard and Company.

3: NPR Choice page

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The date was February 18, President Roosevelt was prepared to issue an odious executive order E. The Harvard Law graduate had concluded that E. Among other things, it rested on the racist views of Lt. DeWitt, who had reported from the West Coast: It, therefore, follows that along the vital Pacific Coast over , potential enemies of Japanese extraction are at large today. There are indications that the very fact that no sabotage has taken place to date is a disturbing and confirming indication that such action will be taken. Biddle made a Faustian bargain to remain as Attorney General. On February 19, , he acquiesced in the Executive Order, and silently witnessed , Japanese American men, women, and children uprooted from their homes and businesses and stigmatized as traitorous. The day before the Faustian bargain, the Attorney General had written to the President: The Department represented that military officials believed time constraints precluded a case-by-case determination of Japanese American loyalty. But time was not the problem. United States, U. They were later repudiated by Congress in the Civil Liberties Act of , and by lower federal courts in coram nobis proceedings which invalidated the convictions of Gordon Hirabayashi and Fred Korematsu. Attorney General Biddle was not alone in his moral cowardice. Before elevation to the Court by President Roosevelt, Frankfurter had supported his court-packing plan to destroy judicial independence. After his elevation, Justice Frankfurter voted to uphold compulsory flag salute requirements as a condition to public education, and to endorse Mr. McCarthyism confronted HLS with another moral crisis. The two defended academic freedom by refusing to cooperate in reliance on their rights secured by the First and Fifth Amendments, for which they were shunned by HLS. Then Dean Erwin N. Griswold, albeit belatedly, was one of the few in academia who challenged McCarthy. Jonathon Lubell related to Mr. At that time, the dean expressed the position that the Fifth Amendment was available only for those who were involved in criminal activities. Some nine months later, changing his position, the dean wrote that the Fifth Amendment was available to the innocent. There is much more gender, racial, and ethnic diversity amongst the students, faculty, and administration. But has anything else really changed? At present, the Law School, faculty, and most students remain passive while the Constitution and rule of law are daily torn asunder by the trillion dollar military-industrial-terrorism complex that President Dwight D. Eisenhower flagged as the scourge of the nation in his Farewell Address: The total influence â€” economic, political, even spiritual â€” is felt in every city, every State house, every office of the Federal governmentâ€¦ [W]e must not fail to comprehend its grave implicationsâ€¦. In the councils of government, we must guard against the acquisition of unwarranted influence, whether sought or unsought, by the military industrial complex. The potential for the disastrous rise of misplaced power exists and will persist. This usurpation is a clear and present danger to the Republic. The consequences are grim. Consider the year-old Pakistani grandmother exterminated by a predator drone while picking vegetables with her 9-year-old granddaughter, Nabila. At a Congressional briefing, Nabila elaborated: My grandmother asked me to come help her outside. We were collecting okra, the vegetables. I was very scared and all I could think of doing was just run. I kept running but I felt something in my hand. And I looked at my hand. I tried to bandage my hand but the blood kept coming. In fact, I now prefer grey skies. Presidents invoke state secrets to thwart congressional oversight and judicial redress for government assassinations, torture, or kidnappings. The Executive Branch imprisons persons indefinitely at Guantanamo Bay without accusation or trialâ€”even those who have been cleared for years by the military as neither an enemy combatant nor a threat to the United States! President Obama based on political expediency refuses to enforce laws, for instance, declining to prosecute torture in the interrogation of Al Qaeda suspects including waterboarding as chronicled in the Executive Summary of the Senate Intelligence Committee Torture Report. Publication of the full report has been blocked by President Obama because of alleged concerns over the disclosure of classified information. Both Republican and Democratic presidents have trampled on the Fourth Amendment by warrantless,

non-particularized spying on American citizens by the military under Executive Order or otherwise conducting surveillance outside the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act. As recounted in Mr. Justice, judicial independence was compromised. That understanding sacralized the battles at Lexington and Concord and the midnight ride of Paul Revere. Yet Harvard Law School is scampering away from teaching about the epidemic of executive branch lawlessness and revising its curriculum and actions accordingly. Most HLS students are preoccupied with money, celebrity, and power. Justice's "the purpose of law and the end of civil society" is ignored. But if Harvard Law School administrators, professors, and students with all their brains and access to power refuse to reenact Paul Revere with different choreography, then who will? The moral crisis they confront is greater than the crises created by the Japanese American concentration camps and McCarthyism. The Republic itself and rule of law hang in the balance. We know what ignominy that will bring.

4: - Confronting America's Moral Crisis by Thomas Hauser

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Problems playing these files? The s were marked by street protests, demonstrations, rioting, civil unrest, [22] antiwar protests, and a cultural revolution. Martin Luther King Jr. Activism brought about successful political change when there was an aggrieved group, such as African Americans or feminists or homosexuals , who felt the sting of bad policy over time, and who conducted long-range campaigns of protest together with media campaigns to change public opinion along with campaigns in the courts to change policy. Kennedy in helped change the political mood of the country. The new President, Lyndon B. In addition, the Voting Rights Act of had an immediate impact on federal, state and local elections. Within months of its passage on August 6, , one quarter of a million new black voters had been registered, one third by federal examiners. Within four years, voter registration in the South had more than doubled. In , Tennessee had a Most famously, the Johnson campaign ran a commercial entitled the " Daisy Girl" ad , which featured a little girl picking petals from a daisy in a field, counting the petals, which then segues into a launch countdown and a nuclear explosion. Johnson soundly defeated Goldwater in the general election, winning It looked for a new leader and found one in Ronald Reagan , elected governor of California in and reelected in He ran against President Ford for the GOP nomination, and narrowly lost, but the stage was set for Reagan in War on Poverty and Great Society Two main goals of the Great Society social reforms were the elimination of poverty and racial injustice. New major spending programs that addressed education, medical care, urban problems, and transportation were launched during this period. Roosevelt in the s, but differed sharply in types of programs enacted. The largest and most enduring federal assistance programs, launched in , were Medicare , which pays for many of the medical costs of the elderly, and Medicaid , which aids the impoverished. The OEO reflected a fragile consensus among policymakers that the best way to deal with poverty was not simply to raise the incomes of the poor but to help them better themselves through education, job training, and community development. Central to its mission was the idea of " community action ", the participation of the poor in framing and administering the programs designed to help them. Counterculture of the s and Timeline of s counterculture As the s progressed, increasing numbers of young people began to revolt against the social norms and conservatism from the s and early s as well as the escalation of the Vietnam War and Cold War. A social revolution swept through the country to create a more liberated society. As the Civil Rights Movement progressed, feminism and environmentalism movements soon grew in the midst of a sexual revolution with its distinctive protest forms, from long hair to rock music. The hippie culture, which emphasized peace, love and freedom, was introduced to the mainstream. In , the Summer of Love , an event in San Francisco where thousands of young people loosely and freely united for a new social experience, helped introduce much of the world to the culture. In addition, the increased use of psychedelic drugs , such as LSD and marijuana , also became central to the movement. Music of the time also played a large role with the introduction of folk rock and later acid rock and psychedelia which became the voice of the generation. The Counterculture Revolution was exemplified in with the historic Woodstock Festival. Kennedy pushed for ways in which NASA could catch up, [31] famously urging action for a manned mission to the Moon: Having lost the race to the Moon, the Soviets shifted their attention to orbital space stations , launching the first Salyut 1 in This joint mission was the last manned space flight for the U. The Space Race sparked unprecedented increases in spending on education and pure research, which accelerated scientific advancements and led to beneficial spin-off technologies. Vietnam War and Role of the United States in the Vietnam War The Containment policy meant fighting communist expansion where ever it occurred, and the Communists aimed where the American allies were weakest. In August Johnson secured almost unanimous support in Congress for the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution , which gave the president very broad discretion to use military force as he saw fit. Republicans, such as California Governor Ronald Reagan , demanded victory or withdrawal, while on the left strident demands for immediate withdrawal escalated. Starting in , the antiwar movement began. Some opposed the

war on moral grounds, rooting for the peasant Vietnamese against the modernizing capitalistic Americans. Opposition was centered among the black activists of the civil rights movement, and college students at elite universities. Polls showed that most Americans favored carrying out the war to a victorious conclusion, although conversely, few were willing to carry out mass mobilization and expansion of the draft in the pursuit of victory. The Vietnam draft did have numerous flaws in it, especially its high reliance on lower middle class Americans while exempting college students, celebrities, athletes, and sons of Congressmen, although contrary to the claims of antiwar activists, most draftees were not impoverished white and black youths who had no other job opportunity. The average Vietnam draftee was white and from a lower middle class, blue collar background. Only a tiny handful of Ivy League graduates numbered among the 58, US servicemen killed or wounded in the eight years between and George Wallace pulled off the majority of Southern whites, for a century the core of the Solid South in the Democratic Party. With Robert Kennedy hesitant about joining the contest, Minnesota Senator Eugene McCarthy, jumped in on an antiwar platform, building a coalition of intellectuals and college students. McCarthy was not nationally known, but came close to Johnson in the critical primary in New Hampshire, thanks to thousands of students who took off their counter-culture garb and went "clean for Gene" to campaign for him door-to-door. Johnson no longer commanded majority support in his party, so he took the initiative and dropped out of the race, promising to begin peace talks with the enemy. Vice President Hubert Humphrey was too late to enter the primaries, but he did assemble strong support from traditional factions in the Democratic Party. The greatest outburst of rioting in national history came in April following the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr. The Democratic national convention in Chicago was in a continuous uproar, with police confronting antiwar demonstrators in the streets and parks, and the bitter divisions of the Democratic Party revealing themselves inside the arena. Humphrey, with a coalition of state organizations, city bosses such as Mayor Richard Daley, and labor unions, won the nomination and ran against Republican Richard Nixon and independent George Wallace in the general election. Nixon appealed to what he claimed was the "silent majority" of moderate Americans who disliked the "hippie" counterculture. Nixon also promised "peace with honor" in ending the Vietnam War. He proposed the Nixon Doctrine to establish the strategy to turn over the fighting of the war to the Vietnamese, which he called "Vietnamization. The profound splits in the Democratic Party lasted for decades. The proposed Equal Rights Amendment to the Constitution, passed by Congress in and favored by about seventy percent of the American public, failed to be ratified in , with only three more states needed to make it law. In addition, the feminist movement remained dominated by relatively affluent white women. It failed to attract many African-American females, who tended to be of the opinion that they were victims of their race rather than their gender and that many of the feminists came from comfortable middle-class backgrounds who had seldom experienced serious hardship in their lives. The failure of the ERA notwithstanding, many federal laws e. Wade in that women have a constitutional right to choose an abortion, and that cannot be nullified by state laws. Feminists celebrated the decisions but Catholics, who had opposed abortion since the s, formed a coalition with Evangelical Protestants to try to reverse the decision. The Republican party began taking anti-abortion positions as the Democrats announced in favor of choice that is, allowing women the right to choose an abortion. The issue has been a contentious one ever since. Some people advocated dropping all laws against sex between consenting adults, including prostitution, and LGBT people began the struggle for gay liberation. A series of court rulings in the s had struck down most anti-pornography laws, and under pressure from homosexual activist groups, the American Psychiatric Association removed homosexuality from its list of mental disorders in . In , the Hays Code, a censorship guideline imposed on the motion picture industry since the s, was lifted and replaced by a new film content rating system, and by the s, there was a surge in sexually-explicit movies and social commentary coming from Hollywood. Notable X-rated films that were widely screened in the early s provoking much public controversy, and in some states, legal prosecution include *Deep Throat*, *The Devil in Miss Jones*, and *Last Tango in Paris*, starring Marlon Brando, whose performance was nominated for an Academy Award. A new wave of raunchier adult magazines such as *Hustler* and *Penthouse* arrived, making *Playboy* seem dull and old-fashioned. Due in large part to the dramatic reduction in the risk of unwanted pregnancy engendered by the introduction of the Pill in , not to mention the

legalization of contraception nationwide by the Supreme Court decision in *Griswold v. Connecticut* in 1965, along with the steadily increasing acceptance of abortion and delayed marriages for career-minded young women influenced by second-wave feminism, or the chic rejection of the responsibilities of marriage altogether in favor of living together without raising a family, U.S. Birthrates hit an all-time low during the post-OPEC recession in the mid-1970s. As the decade drew to a close, however, there was a growing disgust among many conservative Americans over the excesses of the sexual revolution and liberalism, which would culminate in a revival of conservatism during the next decade, and a backlash against the incipient gay rights movement. He maintained the high taxes and strong economic regulations of the New Deal era and he intervened aggressively in the economy. In August 1971, he took the nation off the gold standard of the Bretton Woods system and imposed for a while price and wage controls Nixon Shock. During his final year in office, Nixon also proposed a national health care system. Nixon promoted "Vietnamization," whereby the military of South Vietnam would be greatly enhanced so that U.S. The combat troops were gone by and Nixon could announce a peace treaty Paris Peace Accords in January 1973. His promises to Saigon that he would intervene if North Vietnam attacked were validated in 1975, but became worthless when he resigned in August 1974. In May 1970, the antiwar effort escalated into violence, as National Guard troops shot at student demonstrators in the Kent State shootings. In 1973, Nixon announced the end of mandatory military service which had been in effect since the Korean War, and the final American citizen to be conscripted received his draft notice in June 1973. The president also secured the passage of the 26th Amendment, lowering the minimum age of voting from 21 to 18. The Nixon Administration seized on student demonstrations to mobilize a conservative majority consisting of middle-class suburbanites and working-class whites critical of radical extremists. Economics also played a role in this mobilization. A poll taken by Newsweek in 1970 found that a plurality of middle Americans believed that blacks had a better chance of getting adequate schooling, a decent home, and a good job. Most of these middle Americans were blue-collar workers, white-collar employees, school teachers, and lower-echelon bureaucrats. Although not poor, according to William H. Chafe they suffered from many of the tensions of marginal prosperity, such as indebtedness, inflation, and the fear of losing what they had worked so hard to attain. Struggling to get by, many middle Americans viewed antipoverty expenditures and black demands as representing a threat to their own well-being. If feminists, blacks, antiwar demonstrators, and advocates for the poor attacked the status quo with uncompromising vehemence, millions of other Americans rallied around the flag and made clear their intent to uphold the lifestyle and values to which they had devoted their lives. Significantly, pollsters Richard Scammon and Ben Watterburg pointed out, the protesters still represented only a small minority of the country. At the same time, Nixon became a lightning rod for much public hostility regarding the war in Vietnam. The morality of conflict continued to be an issue, and incidents such as the My Lai Massacre further eroded support for the war and increased efforts of Vietnamization. However he did manage to secure large-scale funding for South Vietnam, much of which was wasted. However, Watergate resulted in significant Democrat gains in the midterm elections and when the new 94th Congress convened the following January, it immediately voted to terminate all aid to South Vietnam in addition to passing a bill forbidding all further US military intervention in Southeast Asia. President Ford was against this, but as Congress had a veto-proof majority, he was forced to accept. Later nearly one million Vietnamese managed to flee to the U.S. The impact on the U.S. Nixon and his next two successors Ford and Carter had dropped the containment policy and were not willing to intervene anywhere. The result was a major expansion of the money supply, resting largely on government deficits, which pushed prices rapidly upward. After 1973, the U.S.

5: Confronting the Moral Crisis of Mass Incarceration | The Village Chicago

Confronting America's Moral Crisis: Restoring Our Values and Integrity by Tom Hauser, Frank Macchiarola
Morals are at the heart of how people relate to one another. They reflect what we think of ourselves.

Sign up for Take Action Now and get three actions in your inbox every week. You can read our Privacy Policy here. Thank you for signing up. For more from The Nation, check out our latest issue. Support Progressive Journalism The Nation is reader supported: Travel With The Nation Be the first to hear about Nation Travels destinations, and explore the world with kindred spirits. Sign up for our Wine Club today. Did you know you can support The Nation by drinking wine? That statementâ€”that America believes itself exempt from the law of cause and effectâ€”seems especially abstract. But the belief has a very concrete expression: Blowback , as many Nation readers are aware, was a term introduced into popular circulation by the late political scientist Chalmers Johnson, an old Cold Warrior turned dissident. The question of causality is complex. For some philosophers and physicists, time might not exist. But in the everyday, finite world we live in, we, as sentient beings, need causality to make sense of things, to order our experiences, distribute resources and power more equitably, and create the conditions for a more humane and sustainable society. Hillary Clinton herself makes this point , using this quotation in her It Takes a Village as an epigraph: Henry Melvill, circa There are different ways by which the oblivion that allows this disassociation is produced. And I was always struck by historical stupor of most foreign policy officials. But then that official would be rotated out of country after his two-year post, with his successor once again portraying the death squads as outside of US control. Beyond institutional amnesia, a rejection of causal analysis is the existential rock on which American Exceptionalism sits. Yet history is denied, or at least what is denied is an understanding of the past as a series of causal relationships. The denial of history is also what allows for our habitual interventionism. Yes, Kissinger is a war criminal. Yes, Kissinger bears some degree of responsibility for the deaths of millions of people. Most foreign policy officials and their pundit-scribes unthinkingly deny cause and effect. Born in Germany and educated in continental metaphysics, Kissinger, unlike others in the foreign policy establishment, is keenly aware of the stakes in different ways of thinking about the past. Kissinger thinks himself an historian. Kissinger was among the first, in , to compare Saddam Hussein to Adolph Hitler. They need to confront, to stem, to combat, to seize, to bend, to stand athwart history and steer its course. And they can only do that if they realize their freedom of action, and do not succumb to causal determinism. When that radicalization causes a crisis that threatens the interests of the United States, its leaders have a moral responsibility to act, to refuse to be paralyzed by either the fact or the fear of blowback. I do not believe a vote in is a plan to defeat ISIS in When people go to vote in primaries or caucuses, they are voting not only for the president, they are voting for the commander in chief. Bernie Sanders has a mixed record when it comes to militarism. But, at the very least, his campaign has forced the fact of historyâ€”of cause-and-effect blowbackâ€”into the political debate. Last week, he even got Chris Matthews to sound just a little like Noam Chomsky: I think the kind of regime change the United States has brought forth over many, many years has been counterproductive, all right? You go way back and you talk about the overthrowing of Mosaddegh. You remember Mosaddegh in Iran? We were wrong about it. Oh, he wasâ€”he wanted to nationalize oil there. The British were upset. The Eisenhower administration worked with him. And you know we ended up with Khomeini? We overthrew Salvador Allende in Chile, who was elected democratically. And you know what we ended up with? A lot of anti-American sentiment in Latin America. So, what foreign policy is about is not just power. I think we got to be a little bit careful about regime change. Hillary Clinton sees as a mentor of hers, Henry Kissinger. So, let me be very clear: I do not see Henry Kissinger as a mentor of mine. I think he was one of the worst secretaries of state in the history of this country. We had something to do with that baby. And something to do probably with Patrice Lumumba. We had a long history of â€”but now we have something, as you say, regime change. So, instead of unofficial or official assassination policy, we now have a regime change policy. Sanders even got Matthews to admit that militarism is largely driven by domestic politics: You got it, man. You stand up to them. The war drums for the war in Iraq, I remember like it was yesterday. His new book, The End of the

Myth: From the Frontier to the Border Wall, will be published in March To submit a correction for our consideration, [click here](#). For Reprints and Permissions, [click here](#).

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America's moral crisis Luke Cooper is Senior Lecturer in Politics at Anglia Ruskin University. He is currently writing a book on the historical sociology of the long nineteenth century.

Subscribe Log In How to Confront a Crisis of Cultural Confidence In his new book, Leon Kass shows Americans how to honor the benefits of liberal democracy, including individual freedom and human equality, while recognizing their high costs. His writings are posted at www.leonkass.com. On the left, respected figures encourage fears that the end of days is drawing near for the American experiment in self-government. On the right, some eminent men and women agree that Trump presents a uniquely toxic political threat and must be resisted intransigently. Others, farther to the right, take a longer and grimmer view, seeing Trump not as a cause but as a symptom of an already fatally flawed enterprise. Liberal democracy in America, according to them, inevitably generates isolated individuals, enfeebled families, and withered communities; a working life of grinding drudgery, preening ambition, insatiable greed; an educational system that inculcates ignorance, narcissism, and self-righteousness; and a degrading popular culture that radiates hostility to honor, nobility, and holiness. One common response to these prophets of doom and gloom is to double down on the goodness of contemporary life. Touting the manifest material improvements and gains in freedom and equality that have been inseparable from the rise of liberal democracy over the last three centuries, stalwarts of the status quo maintain that humanity has never had it so good. It would be truer to say that liberal democracy in America has imposed high costs and conferred substantial benefits. Luckily for us, we have at hand a rigorous and reasonable assessment of both the costs and the benefits. In *Leading a Worthy Life: Finding Meaning in Modern Times*, the incomparable Leon Kass has gathered sixteen masterful essays on the character of our times published over the last several decades. But the weakening of tradition also created an opportunity to take a fresh look at traditional claims about justice, human nature, and politicsâ€”an opportunity seized by Socrates. Immortalized in the dialogues of his student Plato, Socrates investigated conventional opinions about morality and politics while exposing the confusions of those who thought they could see through and dispense with inherited beliefs, practices, and institutions. In Part I, and in particular in his reflections on love and family, Kass sees more harms than happiness. Written amid the rise of the campus hook-up culture in the 1960s and 70s, his essays predate the entrenchment at colleges and universities of Title IX bureaucracies that equate now-unfashionable opinions about the sexes with harassment, and sex regretted with sexual assault. But the disorder and distress of the present have been long a-building. Yet individuals do remain free to buck contemporary norms and rebel against the new libertinism. If we rely on implants and drugs rather than on effort, discipline, and education to enhance human functioningâ€”from running, jumping, and throwing to feeling, thinking, and rememberingâ€”will our attainments fulfill our aspirations for excellence? If medicines calm our spirits, brighten our moods, and block the formation of painful memories, will we learn from experience and maintain the capacity to refine and elevate our passions? What becomes of dignityâ€”in the basic sense of what is owed to each because of our shared humanity, and in the lofty sense of flourishing as citizens and human beingsâ€”when we achieve physical and spiritual satisfaction without activity? As Kass proceeds to show in Part III, liberal education once provided students with the store of knowledge and the habits of mind to pose and pursue such questions. But liberal education todayâ€”or the nefarious imposter that has conquered our campusesâ€”is more likely to stunt curiosity, truncate sympathies, sap imagination, dull critical faculties, enervate understanding, and restrict horizons. So grave is the failure of our educational system that we are in danger of losing even a working acquaintance with the moral and spiritual sources that sustain liberal democracy in America. In Part IV, the final chapters of his book, Kass distills a lifetime of learning and reflection on those sustaining sources. He associates them with three cities: Athens, Jerusalem, and Gettysburg. Unlike contemporary moral philosophers and professors of ethics who derive abstract conclusions from abstract premises, Aristotle teaches that the aim of ethical inquiry is to clarify the best way to live in concrete reality. And in contrast to both the moralists who search out universal and objective moral laws and the moral relativists who assert that all ethical judgments are inherently subjective, Aristotle argues

that ethical study revolves around the moral and intellectual virtues—those qualities of character and mind that enable human beings to live in accordance with the finest in human nature. Central to the biblical wisdom that Kass associates with the holy city of Jerusalem are the Ten Commandments. The commandment prohibiting idolatry categorically forbids the demeaning worship of either nature or man. What, though, of political freedom and human equality? Neither Athens nor Jerusalem rests on or elaborates the principles that were resoundingly affirmed in in the Declaration of Independence and adroitly embodied in in the Constitution. These create a framework in which rights are understood to inhere equally in each without regard to race, class, or sex, and all citizens can discover and lead worthy lives. At Gettysburg in , Kass argues, Abraham Lincoln not only preserved the founding significance of those principles but also improved on them. Lincoln sought to remove the doubt. Freedom and equality, Lincoln taught, were not only premises on which the American experiment in self-government rested but promises that the nation was committed to honoring. Has he made matters too easy? Although spiritual denizens of the three cities may learn to coexist peacefully, and while a combined ethos of the three cities may dwell in the same individual soul, do they not resist complete and final reconciliation? In fact, Kass has not made matters easy but more complicated and more challenging, and also more rewarding. Intellectuals typically align themselves with a single tradition while dismissing its challengers, thereby circumscribing their horizons and depriving themselves of the wisdom furnished by rivals. Kass does the opposite. He seeks to recover the three traditions despite his awareness—at once disquieting and invigorating—that a final synthesis is elusive. Rather than focusing on proofs and refutations, he strives to give rival opinions their due. Thus, he honors the principles of individual freedom and human equality in which America is grounded while recognizing their tendency to loosen constraints, inflate self-regard, and induce conformity. He is acutely aware of the benefits to physical health and material prosperity conferred by scientific inquiry without falling for the comforting illusion that science provides ethical guidance concerning the wise use of powerful new medicines, devices, and therapies. One crucial implication of these essays is that only in a regime grounded in individual freedom and human equality can the unresolved, and perhaps unresolvable, contest among Athens, Jerusalem, and Gettysburg be peaceably and fruitfully lived out. Toward that end, a cultivation of Kassian sobriety and moderation would not only enable more of us to lead worthy lives but also greatly improve the prospects of liberal democracy in America.

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