



The Sorry State Of Our Public Discourse

That the quality of public discourse in the U.S. is abysmal is no news. Yet it is worthwhile to pose the query: Why has it degenerated to such a low level? One reason seems to stand out above all others. We have become a nation of thoroughly-amused idiots. Idiocy is enabled so long as one is content with the condition—smugly construing it as something other than what it actually is. We Americans fail to notice our ignorance simply because we're chronically occupied with activities that keep us magnificently satisfied.

The mere fact that more than 1% of the electorate would ever consider voting for a Republican is itself an indicator of the extent to which ignorance afflicts our society. That more than just a nutty fringe takes the G.O.P. seriously is tremendously disturbing. After all the harm it has done, how is it possible for anyone to support right-wing policy? The present essay proposes an answer. To put it bluntly: People don't know anything...and are perfectly content to not know anything. Intellectual emaciation exists, in part, because there is a deafening paucity of intellectual curiosity. The dearth of intellectual curiosity can be largely attributed to the fact that we spend far more time on passive-minded, vapid activities than on efforts to edify ourselves. We not only tolerate our own insipidity, we RELISH it.

In American pop culture, it seems, the more vacuous and inane it is, the better it will sell. This has become a self-reinforcing condition, as business caters to the LCD in order to broaden appeal, and thus maximize revenue. Erudition, then, is bad for business in a world of mass-market sensibilities. One doesn't have to read about the culture industry in the Frankfurt School to recognize how deleterious this is to the weal of our society.

We Americans are fantastically well-entertained yet egregiously un-informed. Part of this problem is a blurring between the appropriately PUBLIC vis a vis the appropriately PRIVATE. Bizarrely, we care more about fellatio in the White House and a congressman's tawdry Twitter messages than we do about the objective merit of the policies that public officials endorse. Why is this? Scandal is more enticing than the task of cultivating an aptitude in the fundamentals of sociology and Keynesian economics.

Of course, we shouldn't give a hoot if a public official enjoys wearing his grandma's underwear while fellating his cat. So long as he doesn't allow his private feline fetishes to interfere with the responsible execution of his public duties, his private affairs should be none of our concern. An adept servant of the general welfare is adept regardless of what he happens to be doing with his personal time. Yet we Americans love scandal, and will focus on a "juicy scoop" before we take the time to scrutinize the logic of an important policy proposal.

Alas, in an age of Facebook and daily celebrity gossip, we've acclimated ourselves to making irrelevant matters into matters of utmost importance. We've made a habit of treating inconsequential affairs as though they were of urgent public concern—making the private lives of other people OUR business. Instead of asking, "Do his social policies make sense?" we ask, "What has he been doing with his penis?" Instead of asking, "On which economic principles is he basing that legislation?" we ask, "What is he wearing?"

While we're blissfully distracted by the lure of the petty and inconsequential, we are oblivious of our obliviousness. We read tabloid rags and gossip mags, yet haven't the faintest clue about which works: supply-side economics or demand-side economics. So when a politician puts forth a policy proposal, we can't ascertain whether he's wonderfully erudite or completely full of shit. All we know is who we're voting for on Dancing With The Stars.

We seem to be fine with our ignorance, because we seem only to be concerned with whether the person proposing the policy is having sex with the appropriate people. We fail to notice the degree of our ignorance because we're too busy updating our Facebook page and spreading gossip on Twitter. All the while, we construe our nescience for sapience. We strive to be "trendy", as if conforming to ambient norms were a badge of dignity...and eventually lose the ability or the will to think for ourselves.

Pandemic clueless-ness can persist so long as people remain ignorant of their ignorance. Being chronically distracted by the trivial is one way to ensure such ignorance-of-ignorance continues. If people aren't aware that they don't know something, they will not be inclined to try to learn about it. After all, we don't know about that which we don't know...so why bother investigating? So long as millions of people remain blissfully distracted by Reality TV and the celebrity scandal du jour, they will fail to notice how oblivious they are about things that ACTUALLY MATTER.

Common sense tells us: If one isn't aware that there is a problem, then they won't be motivated to fix it. If one is completely unaware that one's thinking is flawed, then one will tend not to take measures to rectify it. The primary way one will remain unaware is by staying perpetually preoccupied with OTHER THINGS: the baseball game, the talk-show, the amusing spectacle on the evening news, the latest clothing fashion updates, and provocative Facebook postings.

And so it goes: We Americans have attended fantastically well to our immediate gratifications even as we haven't the faintest clue why our economy is a mess...or how our economy can be fixed. Consequently, when someone tells us to throw more gas on the fire in order to extinguish it, we eagerly oblige. As long as we don't miss the latest episode of our favorite television program, we're perfectly content to go along with the most enticing-sounding sales pitch.

The Republicans have pulled off a major stunt by convincing the majority of Americans that the way to jump-start the economy is to slash taxes on the super-rich (and provide even larger tax-breaks for cash-hoarding corporations) while cutting vital social services for the rank and file...and avoiding desperately needed investment in public works. This could only be possible in a world where the target audience is captivated by Oprah instead of engaged in education.

The G.O.P. (a wholly owned subsidiary of the corporate lobby) has offered the above prescription since 1980, and has ruined the economy as a result. Only a stupendously ignorant electorate could possibly swallow such preposterous proposals. Yet swallow they do—eagerly. In perpetrating such a perverse heist, the right wing has essentially persuaded millions to endorse EVEN MORE of the disastrous policies that have screwed them over for the past few decades. The right wing has ALSO persuaded millions to vilify anyone who attempts to make things better by proposing progressive policy. Obvious solutions are incessantly labeled “socialist” while the right-wing agenda is passed off as the embodiment of “freedom”. Alas, through a right-wing prism, people see chimerical dangers of government activity around every corner...even as they become incapable of seeing the very real dangers of highly-concentrated private power.

Now captured by moneyed interests as well, even the Democratic Party has participated in this plutocratic gimmick in order to curry favor with the oligarchs. Obama has not only failed to reverse the disastrous Bush tax-cuts, but has actually extended them. Meanwhile, he has failed to enact robust ROTA for the financial industry (snubbing Elizabeth Warren is a glaring point in case). Moreover, he has

failed to invest enough money in basic public infrastructure and in crucial social services...thereby forgoing most opportunities to stimulate the economy and actually help the rank and file.

For this, Obama is accused of being a “socialist”.It rarely occurs to most people that Obama’s problem is that he’s too far to the RIGHT.It’s an ominous sign of our times that a less-than-fanatical corporatist is seen by millions as “too socialist” because he’s not as corporatist as the alternatives from the other side of the aisle.Should we expect anything more from a general populace more concerned with inappropriate blowjobs than with the fiscal multiplier?

Let’s review.For trying to curb the most egregious abuses of the banking industry and of the medical insurance industry, Obama is accused of plotting a Soviet-style tyranny.Preventing corporate power from continuing to wreak havoc on the hoi polloi is called a “government takeover of everyone’s life”.Americans are too busy flipping through their In Touch and In Style magazines to understand the absurdity of such right-wing propaganda.So the scam works.Corporatists pass off their agenda as a noble endeavor to help the general populace.And so the house continues to burn... even as the arsonist laughs all the way to the bank.

It’s like the arsonist sabotaging the fire engines, setting up roadblocks between the fire station and the burning house, then complaining that the fire department isn’t putting out the conflagration fast enough. “See, the house is still burning!So LISTEN TO ME,” the arsonist pleads.He then proposes pouring more gasoline on the house.“There’s still fire!If the (sabotaged) fire-hoses haven’t yet saved the house, then blame the fire department for the fire.”The conclusion peddled: “We should use gas instead of water to stop the blaze.”

Surely only a sucker would listen to the arsonist’s proposal...yet that is precisely what millions of Americans are doing with corporatists regarding economic “solutions”.Blame the fire department for not fixing the problem fast enough, and listen to the arsonist.Never mind that it’s the arsonist who set the fire AND prevented the fire department from being able to take sufficient measures to stop the destruction.It’s the fire department’s fault that your home is being destroyed.

Our horrendously ineffective, egregiously corrupt, and colossally inefficient medical system is a glaring example of our predicament.The FPSTI is bilking hundreds of millions of Americans with ridiculously exorbitant billing schemes...while leaving tens of millions out in the cold.Corporatists insist that the solution is to privatize the

medical system EVEN MORE. Public health, they insist, should be treated like a consumer product, patient should be treated as customers, and healthcare should be run like a business. This makes perfect sense in a hyper-consumerist society, where everyone is obsessed with shopping.

To those who devote their evening to watching TMZ and Entertainment Tonight, such proposals sound perfectly reasonable. Millions of Americans aren't aware of why such a proposal doesn't make sense; all they know is what's going to be in fashion next season according to Bazaar magazine. It's no wonder that millions can't understand how preposterous such a proposal actually is. We all know which singer we fancy the most on American Idol. So why bother trying to understand macro-economics?

Millions of Americans still subscribe to myths that have been dis-proven over and over and over. What would allow such flagrantly self-destructive behavior to persist? It seems that so long as their team wins the ballgame tonight, they attend church each Sunday, and they can view new photos on their friend's Facebook page, Americans are more than happy to support policies that are deleterious to the general welfare. After all, they may not be able to pay their exorbitant medical bills next week, but at least the next episode of American Idol will be televised. (Besides, Regis & Kelly seem perfectly fine each morning. So what's all the fuss about?)

If I want to complain about problems in the world, I'll focus on the sex life of a public official instead of on how Goldman Sachs is destroying the economy. (After all, that's what Regis & Kelly are talking about!) When's the last time a critical analysis of supply-side economics and regressive tax policy was the topic of discussion on a morning talk show? Wouldn't we rather learn how to bake a more delicious cake or select of better flower arrangement for the foyer?

Anyone who can think his way out of a paper bag can see that trickle-down economics is a hoax. To still be under the impression that supply-side economic theory holds water is to have succumbed to a severe case of cognitive dissonance—or to be astoundingly oblivious. Amusement can serve as an anesthetic to cognitive dissonance, and as a palliative for ignorance.

Indeed, to believe Neoliberal claims, one needs to ignore mountains and mountains and mountains of evidence. This comes easily when people are fixated on the private lives of public figures: What are they wearing and who are they fucking? Such information serves to placate our pathological urges to constantly get the "juicy scoop" on today's scandalous activity.

Alas, a morning talk show tends not to help educate people about Keynesian economics, as its format is predicated on vacuous chit-chat and banal banter. Only when people decide to turn off the television, put down the gossip mag, and stay away from the tabloids will their attention be liberated for more edifying activities.

A brief review of what's transpiring on the economic scene:

For three decades now, the myth that "the private sector" will somehow make it all better has been hawked and peddled to the point of distraction. Anyone who has been paying any attention knows that such a claim is balderdash. Looking at the past decade, corporate profits have been the highest precisely when the jobless rate has been highest, and when economic woes for the rabble has been most severe. Point in case: Corporate profits in 2010 and 2011 were between \$1.6 and \$1.7 trillion even as the unemployment rate was between 9 and 10%. Meanwhile, the real income of the non-super-rich has GONE DOWN...even as the super-rich have become EVEN MORE super-rich. How does this square with right-wing propaganda?

It doesn't.

The two years following the economic catastrophe of 2008 (caused directly BY right-wing policies) saw record profits for Big Business (especially oil companies and financial investment firms)...even as the jobless rate rose. Exxon-Mobil and Goldman Sachs are splendidly happy even as the rabble suffers. HOW? WHY? These are important questions to ask. They are questions that can't be answered by watching another episode of Survivor. They are questions that will NEVER be answered in a tabloid paper like the New York Daily News or the New York Post. The score for last night's ballgame is discussed intensely, yet the ways in which trickle-down economics has never worked simply doesn't make snazzy copy.

Now, in 2011, companies are sitting on over \$3 trillion...even as 20% of the population is in need of full-time work. HOW? WHY? Meanwhile, corporations are setting up shop abroad, creating hundreds of thousands of jobs in foreign lands. As all this happens, corporatists tell us that corporations don't have enough money... and need to be given EVEN MORE gigantic tax-breaks. Why? In order to help POOR people, of course. Is it possible to take such a patently absurd claim seriously? Yes. If one is only familiar with the latest escapades on Jersey Shore, such flagrant drivel can sound credible.

In reality, large corporations are making plenty of money, they just aren't spending it on workers here in the U.S. American firms generated \$1.68 trillion in profits during the last quarter of 2010 alone...even as unemployment remained at high levels. So what's going on here? According to the Republicans, Big Business doesn't have enough power. They need more "incentive". They're not creating jobs because of unwieldy tax burdens. So, according to the corporatist narrative, we help the rank and file by helping corporate power. Help the rich get richer, and their largess will somehow, someday, eventually "trickle down" to the rank and file...maybe. Don't pay attention to the fact that this has never actually happened. "Just keep watching your Reality TV, and trust us," they say. "But beware! If you support progressive policies, you'll be taxed into oblivion and the big, bad government will take over your lives! So if you want to avoid tyranny, listen to US."

According to right-wing propaganda, the reason the United States has all the problems it has is because of intellectual elites and secularism and humanism and too many social programs to help the rank and file stay on their feet. According to Neoliberal doctrine, there are too many measures taken by the State to curb the most egregious corporate abuses...and THAT'S why you don't have a job. "We don't help Big Business enough!" we're told. "People are struggling because they can't get the government off their backs!"

Mr. Goebbels would have been envious of such brazen propaganda.

The victims have fallen in love with their rapists. The G.O.P. has orchestrated a case of collective Stockholm Syndrome. The victims are fine with supporting their rapist so long as each victim can be notified each day which celebrity is dating which...and which celebrity was wearing the most fashionable outfit yesterday. It can be safely assumed: If the general populace was even remotely well-informed, the G.O.P. would quite literally cease to exist. Yet millions are horribly informed, so the G.O.P. continues to thrive.

Unemployment exists due to of right-wing economic policy. Gross inequality exists due to right-wing economic policy. Real income for the middle class has stagnated for three decades because of right-wing economic policy. The economy almost collapsed in 2008 because of right-wing economic policy. The deficit exists as a result of right-wing economic priorities. Yet if one listens to the tall tales told by the Chamber of Commerce, The Club For Growth, The Heritage Foundation, Americans For Prosperity, Freedom Works, the Mercatus Center, or the American Enterprise Institute, right-wing policy is the only thing that can REMEDY these problems...and

progressives are to blame for all that ails us. These right-wing propaganda factories churn out waves of misinformation in order to serve their corporate paymasters. Their vision of anarcho-capitalism is promoted under the auspices of some bizarre devotion to “freedom”. This surreal narrative is swallowed hook, line and sinker by the most uneducated (and credulous) segment of the population.

In a well-educated society, such dubious dogma-mills would either be laughed into nonexistence or ignored into irrelevance. Yet, alas, they ply their trade with gag-inducing success. The extent to which credulous audiences fall for their corporatist sophistry is breathtaking to observe. Welcome to America.

The sales-pitch is seductive: Corporate power is the medicine that can cure what ails us. Give the powerful MORE power, and they will create jobs for the hoi polloi. Such Neoliberal voodoo economic hallucinations have served corporate power well over the past three decades. Such devious prescriptions have greatly benefited big oil, big pharma, the financial investment firms, and private military contractors (i.e. everyone EXCEPT the rank and file).

Alas, we Americans are easily seduced by jingoism, and imbibe super-patriotic fervor like a tasty elixir. Drunk on exceptionalism, triumphalism, and national chauvinism, we wave our flags and fetishize militarism until we’re red, white, and blue in the face. We spend a trillion dollars of tax-payer money each year funding the out-of-control military-industrial complex...while our public infrastructure crumbles and vital social services deteriorate from neglect. All the while, we wait eagerly for the benefits allotted to the privileged few to “trickle down” to the rabble. Yet it has never happened.

Intoxicated with our own braggadocio, we cheer our pointless global garrison state... even as the rabble suffers and Big Business engorges itself with ever more gargantuan profits. All of this: courtesy of right-wing economic policy. Even now, millions are duped into cheering for corporatist policies while suffocating on their consequences—like a beaten-down crack addict who strives to save himself by taking another hit. The pipe will save him, he continues to believe, as his mind disintegrates and his body struggles to survive. Meanwhile, the crack-dealer laughs all the way to the bank.

Nobel laureate Michael Spence (author of *The Next Convergence*) noted which American companies created jobs at home from 1990 to 2008. The results are jaw-dropping for those who haven’t been paying attention. The companies that did

business in global markets (especially banking and financial services) contributed ALMOST NOTHING to overall American job growth. So helping them hoard EVEN MORE money for themselves is clearly not going to help blue-collar workers. YET... the ladies haven't managed to mention such vital facts on The View during their morning chit-chat sessions.

Economic illiteracy will abound in the United States so long as people devote more time to reading US Weekly than Joseph Stiglitz. How does the economy REALLY work? Millions haven't the faintest clue, but they can name the entire cast of Survivor, The Bachelor, and Desperate Housewives. Idle pre-frontal cortexes atrophy as our limbic system is occupied with perpetual stimulation...rendering large swaths of the general populace susceptible to the mendacious balderdash churned out by right-wing propaganda factories like the Heritage Foundation. We've become desensitized to idiocy AND to mendacity...but have been thoroughly acclimated to a media tailored to children with A.D.D. So we remain astonishingly clueless. Go figure.

The climate is ripe for right-wing ideology to flourish, uninhibited by a widespread awareness of Reality—unencumbered by evidence—safe from the dangers of critical analysis from a well-educated citizenry. As we fuss over the erotic escapades of public officials, some of us fail to become aware of the following irrefutable facts about the American economy:

- Taxes in the U.S. as percentage of GDP are at their lowest level in over 60 years. The U.S. is one of the lowest taxes of the big industrial economies—with gigantic loopholes and ridiculous tax-breaks and enormous subsidies for Big Business that are absolutely ridiculous. Tax-breaks for the affluent and for large corporations have ALWAYS had a smaller fiscal multiplier than investment in social services and public infrastructure. But they don't tell you that in People magazine.
- The rich countries that are in the best shape right now are Germany and Scandinavia: the States that tax private wealth robustly while investing the most in social services and public infrastructure (including universal public healthcare). What do they have to show for such progressive policies? The strongest growth, lowest unemployment, stable economies, as well as the happiest and healthiest people. What have right-wing economic policies given the U.S. since 1980? Stagnant real income for the rank and file, gross inequalities that are flagrantly meritocratic, and crumbling infrastructure...not to mention a disastrous FPSTI instead of an effective and efficient public

healthcare system. To top it off, hyper-privatization and deregulation caused the disaster of 2008. How do you like them apples?

- There are mountains of evidence that prudent State involvement in an economy acts as a catalyst for free-market growth, clearly demonstrating that Keynes was (mostly) right and the Chicago School was horribly wrong. In the 50's and 60's especially, the U.S. government made massive investments in science and technology, in state universities and infant industries, and in public infrastructure projects...making the U.S. the envy of the world. Such investments triggered two generations of economic growth and put the U.S. on top of the world of technology and innovation. This exalted history has been forgotten. Now the U.S. is the laughing stalk of the developed world. We concentrate on the sexual escapades of public figures while learning economics from celebrity charlatans on TV who are paid to toe the line of corporate interests. But this wasn't explained during the last episode of Jersey Shore.
- Since the 80's, when right-wing economic policies have taken over, inequality has skyrocketed, real wages have actually GONE DOWN, and bubbles keep forming and popping. We starve the State instead of using the State for "the general welfare"—which is what the Founding Father's intended, as stipulated in the preamble to the Constitution. We then allow corporatists to use the State as a siphoning mechanism—channeling tax-payer money into the coffers of private businesses. This is a scandal, but one doesn't learn such things by reading In Style magazine. (Though one will receive a far better education in economics from gossip mags than from right-wing propaganda rags like The Weekly Standard or The National Review.)
- Of the world's richest countries, the U.S. has by far the most involvement of the private sector in healthcare. What is the result of this inadvisable approach? FAR inferior care for DOUBLE the expenses...while leaving tens of millions out in the cold to fend for themselves...even as millions more go into bankruptcy from exorbitant medical bills. (The notable exception to this embarrassing outcome: The U.S. boasts access to the best care in the world for the affluent. However, touting this single perk is like telling the majority of New Yorkers who struggle to pay the rent in shitty apartments, "What are you complaining about? Manhattan has the best luxury penthouses in the world!")
- The FPSTI engorges itself on obscene profits even as the U.S. has the worst results of the developed world in every metric of human well-being. But they don't mention this in Cosmo magazine. Alas, when right-wing politicians insist that we should abstain from universal public healthcare (lest we plunge into a

Soviet-style tyranny), credulous audiences believe them. Is it possible for such an advanced society to be so ignorant?

Yes.

Ideology begets wanton ignorance and willful blindness. This comes easy when one's biggest concern is the next episode of a Reality TV show. Examples of widespread fictions are endless. It's a vulgar fable that multi-national corporations are simply "waiting" for more economic / regulatory "certainty" to invest here in the U.S...so we should refrain from all ROTA just to ensure Big Business has peace of mind. Some say regulations would encumber free enterprise. Some say accountability and transparency would somehow deter innovation. Some insist that ROTA involves a "government take-over" of industry. Oh, yeah, and investment in public works is tantamount to "socialism". Some even say that any measure to curb the most egregious corporate abuses is "killing jobs". Providing universal healthcare? A nefarious plot to "control our lives" and "deprive us of choices".

For the last three decades, we have been amusing ourselves to the n^{th} degree even as ever-more right-wing economic policies have been enacted. What do we have to show for it? Huge economic problems for the general populace...and a smug plutocracy.

We allow this to continue because we buy into the enticing Neoliberal narrative. Anything that tries to help the rank and file is depicted as an attack on "our freedom"...while anything that abets corporate interests is deemed the magic of private enterprise. If corporate power grows, it's just the free market in action. This is, of course, hogwash. Yet how can someone KNOW that it's hogwash if they haven't been tutored on the most fundamental facts about the American economy? Right-wing economic idiocy will run rampant so long as the only information people receive is from CNBC, FoxNews, and QVC.

Excuses to avoid ROTA should be dismissed out of hand. Yet Neoliberal propaganda would have us believe that we have too much regulation to blame for our economic woes—because corporations are "frightened" to invest. (The house caught fire because it was constructed with too much flame retardant!) Corporatists tell us that Big Business is hesitant to invest in jobs because executives simply aren't sure how ACCOUNTABLE they may have to be...or of the degree to which corporate abuses

will be curbed. Unemployment can thereby be attributed to progressives' requests for transparency and oversight. (Besides, Republicans tell us, ROTA is tantamount to "socialism"!)

Corporatist scare tactics work splendidly on an American populace that has memorized the cast of their favorite Reality TV show. So long as the rabble stays "tuned in" for the next development on Jersey Shore, corporate power can run amok with impunity. So long as we're interested in the private lives of A-list celebrities, we won't notice how right-wing economic policies are destroying our country.

The trick is quite simple: Neoliberal propaganda caricatures public investment as "socialism" and corporate socialism as "the free market in action". It is thereby able to convince Americans to NOT endorse the former while allowing corporatists to CONTINUE to do the latter. Consequently, we do more of what's screwing us (in the name of private enterprise) and fail to do precisely what needs to be done for the general welfare (out of a fear of some impending "government control of our lives"). We become enamored with the rapist while eschewing offers to be rescued. The conclusion: It's the "progressives" who are the bad guys, and the corporatists who will save us!

But entrepreneurship is still one of America's greatest strength's, right? Wrong. The rate of new business creation has DIMINISHED since the 80's. Funny enough, that's precisely when the financial sector started exploding. A study by the Kauffman Foundation found an inverse correlation between entrepreneurship and the size of the financial sector. The explanation is that the financial sector is based on SPECULATION, not on actually creating anything. Meanwhile, it has sucked up large amounts of talent that may have otherwise done something productive for society.

Want to stimulate (and facilitate) entrepreneurship? Invest in public works. This has been demonstrated time and time and time again. Meanwhile, we must reduce the gargantuan loopholes that allow the 400 richest Americans to pay only 18% in income taxes...and the largest, most profitable corporations to often pay ZERO taxes. When Exxon-Mobil and GE are raking in record profits while paying no taxes, it is asinine to blame unemployment on inadequate corporate power.

Alas, according to the Republicans, the problem is that the super-rich STILL don't have enough money. Per the Neoliberal storyline, the solution is that our already under-funded State needs to give the super-rich and Big Business MORE tax

breaks...while cutting important State services that help the general population.Can people seriously swallow such an obvious sham?Indeed, they can.So long as they remain focused on the latest celebrity scandal, it seems, they'll swallow anything.

Back here in Reality, it's been shown that good industrial policy can be a useful economic catalyst.The State's involvement is not about creating a "command and control economy"; it's about the private and public sectors coming together—in a symbiosis—to decide how best to sustain employment.It's about the State empowering people, not about trying to "control" them.It's a way to ensure a robust economy that benefits everyone, not just the privileged few.(Germany is a great case study in this approach.The results are impressive—and irrefutable.)

Yet Neoliberal propaganda makes use of scare terms like "government take-over" to frighten credulous people away from common sense solutions.So long as people are getting their information from Regis & Kelly, FoxNews, and People magazine, they'll fall for this ruse every time...and continue to support right-wing politicians.The arsonist keeps duping people even as their house continues to burn.

For a non-affluent civilian to endorse Neoliberal economic policy requires a stupendous degree of ignorance.We are a nation afflicted with rampant cognitive sclerosis because mental lethargy is endemic to our pop culture.Behold the intellectual impoverishment that plagues our society: it is no wonder that millions of people are so easily duped.Thronges of voters rally behind G.O.P. operators—under the impression that they're running safely into the arms of their saviors.Such mass political Stockholm Syndrome is exasperating to observe.

Millions of American know who's fucking who and who's wearing what, but still don't know that trickle-down economics is a sham.Even as we wonder who will win the ballgame tomorrow, we should keep in mind that democracy without a well-educated citizenry is no democracy at all; it is a recipe for plutocracy.Insofar as we allow a right-wing agenda to succeed, we enable our captors, implicitly endorsing an oligarchic society.Most people allow this unwittingly, as it doesn't occur to them that they're supporting the very forces that cause the nation's woes.They don't notice the reason behind society's problems because they're too busy attending to other things.

Mindless diversions aren't inherently bad.A little diversion is benign—even quite necessary.I enjoy passive-minded activities as much as the next guy: watching a sitcom to get a good laugh, going to see a mindless action movie here in there, losing



myself in a good ballgame now and then, and even flipping through People magazine in the dentist's waiting room. Such departures from Reality can be wonderfully therapeutic. But I temper such indulgences. I remain aware that such activities are neither going to help me become a better person nor help me contribute to making the world a better place. Such transient gratifications help us abide life's trials: they are FUN, but never EDIFYING. They offer fleeting satisfaction: a much-needed reprieve from the responsibility of being an adult. Yet, like masturbation or a piece of candy, once experienced, we're never any better off for it...and it's time to come back to Reality and attend to what REALLY MATTERS.

Escapism in moderation keeps us sane—we all need to turn our brains off and indulge in it from time to time. Nobody is immune to the allure of trivial entertainment or tasty tidbits of gossip. So sporadically engaging in such activities is only natural for every one of us. But when that's ALL we EVER do, then dysfunction ensues...and we end up becoming degenerate citizens. We base our votes on asinine criteria, supporting horrible candidates for public office because we well-meaning fools simply don't know any better. We become naively complicit in promoting harmful dogma, even as we stay "tuned in" to the next captivating distraction. We're perfectly fine to carry on this way indefinitely, because such distractions enable our ignorance to be comfortable.

Why do we gravitate to such inane diversions while allowing our society to deteriorate? It's because we Americans are hopelessly addicted to amusement. We're being distracted to death. During our favorite TV show, we seem not to notice what's transpiring outside of our homes during each commercial break. Neil Postman noticed this in the 80's; it's gotten a lot more severe since then.

The life of the typical American consists primarily of three things: working at a job in order to pay the bills, attending to logistical necessities (feeding our children, doing our laundry, fixing the plumbing)...and engaging in so-called "guilty pleasures" during our "down time". Each of these things consumes us—each in its own way. The problem is that our non-work time is spent almost ENTIRELY on guilty pleasures. It has gotten to the point where guilty pleasures are no longer considered "guilty pleasures", but just seen as the stuff people normally do when they're not at work and not running necessary errands.

For most, we're not using our pre-frontal cortexes or becoming edified during the typical work-day. So if we're not devoting any time / energy to intellectual stimulation OUT of work, then we wind up with a life of intellectual impoverishment. Our lives are



comprised of careerism and idleness. We are, then, ripe for exploitation and manipulation: because we don't know anything important outside the purview of domestic chores and the responsibilities of our "job". We live in order to earn a paycheck, repair the car, wash the dishes, do the laundry...and to while our time away in banal amusements in between. All a higher paycheck means is being better able to cope with exorbitant medical bills and the ability to purchase more consumer products we're convinced will make us happier. Attending to household chores and childcare can even be outsourced so that we have MORE time to engage in vapid activities.

The most "successful" of us manage to work in high-paying jobs that are often pointless (for ourselves and for society), so that we can then splurge on even more consumer products and spurious accoutrements. The point of the entire charade? There is no point, it turns out. Enveloped in a hyper-consumerist mindset, we're always striving for gratification that's just out of reach—coveting decadence, glamour, luxury and social status because that's how we've been conditioned. The joke is on us. It's no wonder we think of even healthcare and education as consumer products; EVERYTHING becomes a consumer product, including public policy proposals. (We even shop around for love, for an identity, and for self-esteem. It's all business.)

Corporatists have ruined our country, and continue to garner support from credulous citizens seeking esteem. It's like the gullible victim who continues to heed the claims of a charismatic witch-doctor even as the alleged "remedies" keep making her more and more sick...even after it has been conclusively demonstrated to her over and over and over again that the witch-doctor's "remedies" are the very things that made her sick in the first place.

Some people will never learn. They're too busy watching Jersey Shore.