

The Progressive Review

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Washington's most unofficial source

WE ARE NOT
MAKING THIS UP

Percent of Americans who believe Republicans and Democrats offer a clear choice of political philosophies: 27%

Armed border guards on the Mexican border are now more numerous than all the FBI agents in the US, says AP. INS agents outnumber the Bureau of Prisons staff

The *Realist* reports that some insurance companies are claiming that domestic violence is a "pre-existing condition" like diabetes or heart disease and hence not coverable.

A study by the Project on Government Oversight finds there are now only 1.6 Navy ships per admiral. We managed to fight World War II successfully with just one admiral for every 130 ships. Also in 1945 there were 14 generals for every active Army division. Now there are 30. There were 244 aircraft per general in 1945, now there are 23. In 1945 there was one officer for every 11 enlisted personnel. Today there is one for every six.

According to the Center for Media and Public Affairs there was an average of 14 Clinton scandal stories a month on TV news shows during his first term; during his second there have been an average of 140 a month.

Public Campaign reports that while only 5% percent of public earns more than \$100,000 a year, 81% of those contributing to US congressional campaigns do.

Pocket paradigms

Notes for a bottle

We keep looking out into space for an asteroid that will someday hit the earth. Green journalist Pat Mazza says we needn't bother. "With our exploding numbers, growing consumption and increasingly potent technology, we humans are expanding our footprint across most of the earth's landscape. The last time anything like us hit the planet was 65 million years ago when a huge asteroid struck the Yucatan. The worldwide consequences caused the end of the dinosaurs. Now we're the asteroid."

☞

What would happen on a TV news talk show if the host or one of the guests whispered? Would the ratings immediately drop? Or is the noise just to make people think something's happening?

☞

Why do so many of the people who talk about "intellectual property" not seem all that bright? On precisely what date and under what circumstances did an advertising jingle for a new type of tampon become "intellectual property?"

When I was writing my last book, I had to write for permissions. When I asked for permission to quote Woody Guthrie's "This Land is Your Land," the venerable Ludlow Music Co. took care of the matter in a page and a half. When I wanted to quote from a book, the venerable University of Chicago Press worked its way through the problem in one long page. When I wanted to quote eight words from a Mac Davis song, however, I got a letter from some big LA law firm wanting a synopsis of the book, a copy of the chapter of the book in which it would be quoted, as well as all future earnings of my first-born son. I decided to write my own intellectual property.

☞

When I was circulating the book to various publishers, one turned it down saying, "We're looking for civics, not solutions."

☞

I had long suspected that. Which is why we continue to have a Middle East peace process but no peace. And no one around here seems to mind.

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I meet a lot of process people in Washington. They're like vehicles without a drive belt. They make a lot of noise; they just can't go anywhere. Getting things done is now a radical act.

✍

Then there are the virtual people. They only exist as images of themselves. Talking to one of them is like watching a bad cable show without a zapper.

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Some scientists believe that at the rate things are going, process people and virtual people will eventually evolve into species reproductively incompatible with the rest of us. There are already reports of process people and real people mating and producing only sterile offspring -- a sort of mule that understands all the main policy points.

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I read that the 200 richest people in the world have a combined wealth greater than the GDP of each country in the world except for five. If we are going to have this sort of thing, it may be worthwhile thinking about reviving feudalism. At least under that system, the elite had some social responsibilities. And manners.

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Many reporters aren't reporters anymore; they're just semiotic sharecroppers on some corporate plantation.

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Why is it safer to say "fuck" than to say "fascism?" One of the curiosities of post-cold-war rhetoric is that we no longer have a term for those who practice ideologies antithetical to democracy. Only Saddam Hussein still rates a hearty ideological epithet. According to our leaders there are really only two political choices any more: free market economies and those busily converting to this state of grace.

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Current American foreign policy seems aimed at turning incompetent communists into competent fascists, with China the potential jewel in the crown.

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One American politician put it this way: "The liberty of a democracy is not safe if the people tolerate the growth of private power to a point where it becomes stronger than their democratic state itself. That, in its essence, is fascism -- ownership of government by an individual, by a group, or any controlling private power."

Would such a radical be allowed on Sunday morning talk shows today? Probably not, even though his name was Franklin Delano Roosevelt.

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Why do all computers seem to include the games "Minesweeper" and "Solitaire?" Is it because aggression and loneliness are the country's two biggest avocations?

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Sometimes I stand in an airport bookstore and try to figure why God

decided to reveal all of life's mysteries in such a place. Why didn't God make philosophers and theologians and poets as all-knowing as MBAs?

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The average American is subjected to 3,000 commercial messages a day. If you have a good day, a half dozen people will tell you a truth worth remembering. Thus the lies win out 500 to one.

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Irony used to be a weapon used against the powerful. Today it is increasingly used by the powerful to demean the weak.

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We've got too many people in this country employed trying to prevent other people from being bad and not enough people employed helping other people to be good.

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Polls are the way the media ascertains how well we have learned what it has taught us.

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We don't have to worry about Trojan horses much any more. The real danger comes from Trojan words and phrases -- appealing statues of rhetoric concealing the enemy.

✍

What's the difference between believing in UFOs and believing in the flawless efficacy of the

Spin This

Species Extinctions Per Day: 104
Years Until 1/3 Of Species Are Lost: 8
Years Until 80% of Crude Oil Is Gone: 22
Percent Antarctic Ozone Depletion: 70+
Carbon Dioxide, Years Until Doubling: 59

This century is hottest on record, say US scientists. 1990, 1995, and 1997 have been particularly warm

Seventy-five square miles of the Antarctic ice shelf broke off in February. Some scientists expect another 3,000 square miles (the size of Connecticut) to break off within a year or so.

Tornadoes this year have been running at twice the normal average of this year.

marketplace? Probably where the believer went to college.

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There is actually a lot more superstition in Washington than elsewhere in the country -- if superstition means believing something for which there is little or no proof. Of course, a cynic might say that Washington only preaches superstition; it doesn't really believe in it.

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Even anarchy is being institutionalized these days, witness an article in the *New York Times* that declared the Countess Muriel Brandolini D'Adda to be "that newly minted American arbiter of haute-bohemian chic."

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In Washington, however, mere *ex cathedra* declarations aren't enough. You have to back them up with "unassailable data." Thus, it was not surprising to hear from that long minted American arbiter of bas-bohemian chic, post-romanesque architect John Wiebenson, of two women overheard conversing thusly:

"That's a really funky place."
"Exactly how funky is it?"

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We need a trial to judge all those who bear significant responsibility for the 20th century -- the most murderous and ecologically destructive in human history. We could call it the war, air and fiscal crimes tribunal and we could put politicians and CEOs and major media owners in the dock with earphones like Eichmann and make them listen to the evidence of how

they killed millions of people and almost murdered the planet and made most of us far more miserable than we needed to be.

Of course, we wouldn't have time to go after them one by one. We'd have to lump Wall Street investment bankers in one trial, the Council on Foreign Relations in another, and any remaining Harvard Business School or Yale Law graduates in a third.

We don't need this for retribution, only for edification. So there would be no capital punishment, but rather banishment to an overseas Nike factory with a vow of perpetual silence.

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I believe in a modified version of the end-of-history theory, namely that most good combinations of foods have already been discovered. Thus ordering mahi-mahi baked in blueberry jam with a sawdust glaze is probably not a good idea.

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Powerful people, notes Ralph Nader, seldom use the word *justice* any more. It's too dangerous.

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A news conference is a device by which the establishment keeps large numbers of reporters from covering the news every place else.

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If you want to complain about anonymous sources in journalism, is it okay to quote "leading experts" in order to bolster your case?

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Here is what Fareed Zakaria wrote in *Newsweek* some months ago:

"Elections are only a process for creating a fair and law-abiding government. They are not, by themselves, what freedom is all about. A brighter model may lie in some countries of East Asia -- Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand -- often criticized as sham democracies and one-party dictatorships. It is true that they offer limited (and often rigged) electoral choices, but they provide a better environment for their citizen's security and happiness than do many of the new 'democracies.' "

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Here is what William Shirer wrote in a book some years ago:

"For so many, . . . such rights of free men in Germany [as political freedom] had been overshadowed as [Hitler] said, by the freedom to starve. In taking away that least freedom, Hitler assured himself of the support of the working class."

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Any elite that talks endlessly about the challenges of the first half of the 21st century and then forgets to put the year 2000 into their computer programs should be asked to resign.

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At the very least the aforementioned should be permanently barred from writing op-ed pieces about the dangers of those increasingly rare examples of democracy in which the citizens actually get to decide something.

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Everyone in the media was excited about Tina Brown leaving the *New Yorker*. I'm still trying to figure out why someone who loses \$60 million of investors' money in four years is considered such a big success. They say she increased circulation, but I did a calculation. She paid \$300 for each new reader.

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There have been a lot of stories lately about corporate media not telling the truth. Other journalists have been shocked by this. I was just confused. I guess I must have missed the good years.

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Back in the 1960s you weren't meant to trust anyone over 30. Today, it's probably best to be wary of anyone within a standard deviation of Sidney Blumenthal's age.

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What would have happened to Bill Clinton if he had been a master sergeant instead of president? But then, he took care of that a long time ago, didn't he?

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Ecologist Donella Meadows, points out that if a water lily doubling in size each day could eventually cover a pond in 30 days, half that growth would occur on the 29th day. Do you know what day it is for the earth? -- *Sam Smith*

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A subtext for our times

Although it hard to gather from the conventional media, the Clinton scandals reflect a broader decadent culture that has permeated not only Washington politics but other aspects of American life. Key elements of this culture are multinational corporate corruption; the political and economic influence of the illegal drug trade; disinterest in democracy and constitutional protections among politicians, the media and other elites; and a growing sense of impunity by those in power.

This then is the context of the Clinton scandals: they are not aberrations of establishment culture but symptomatic of it. Whereas Nixon's corruption represented a classic conspiracy -- a tightly controlled abuse of power, the corruption of Clinton's Washington represents a whole ecology of abusive power. What is happening now is bipartisan, multinational, multi-professional and pandemic. Thus the consequences are far more serious than Watergate and their cure far more elusive.

Specifically:

☞ **Corporate corruption:** The corporate corruption of politics is at levels unseen since the 1920s or the late 19th century. Unlike these earlier periods, however, much of this corruption is no longer domestic. As former Senate investigator Jack Blum has pointed out, no really major crime is domestically limited anymore. Between the politicians who do not wish to pursue such crime and the primitive state of international law enforcement cooperation, much of this illegality goes unpunished. For example, the Justice Department took a fall on the American aspects of the massive BCCI scandal. For another example, some of the illegal money flowing into Arkansas appeared to have ended up in Grand Cayman, the sixth largest holder of bank assets in the world. As of a few years ago, the island had a population of 18,000, 570 banks, one bank regulator, and a bank secrecy law.

☞ **The drug trade:** According to a UN projection, the world's illegal drug trade is roughly equivalent to the global automobile industry. Could such an industry exist in the United States without direct and significant contact with, and influence over, politicians? Of course not. The drug trade has flourished in part because of curiously incurious politicians such as then-overnor Bill Clinton who

repeatedly ducked demands that he investigate what was going on at Mena and elsewhere in his state. When special prosecutor Donald Smaltz attempted to expand his Agricultural Department probe to areas that might have revealed details of Arkansas' drug trade and some of the major people involved, Attorney General Reno turned him down.

☞ **The Dixie Mafia:** One of the reasons Bill Clinton talked so much about Hope, Arkansas, was so that people wouldn't notice how much of his youth was actually spend in the mob resort town of Hot Springs. But Arkansas didn't really have to import mobsters; it had enough of its own, part of what some law enforcement officers call the Dixie Mafia. As investigative reporter Ambrose Evans-Pritchard writes in *The Secret Life of Bill Clinton*: "Less famous than the Cosa Nostra, the Dixie Mafia was, and still is, far more dangerous." During a ten year period from 1968 to 1978 when the Italian American mobs were in the news for killing 30 people, the organized crime in the south was offing 156.

Rex Armistead, who headed the organized crime strike force in New Orleans in the 1970s, told Evans-Pritchard: "The big difference [with the northern Mafia] was the lack of ceremony. It was just 'I'm going to get rid of Ambrose today;' I don't need permission; and I go out and do it. As simple as that. And that's the end of Ambrose. It hasn't much changed."

Bill Clinton has friends in the Dixie Mafia, he and his wife were close business partners of a crook named Jim McDougal, more than 40 persons or businesses close to Clinton have been convicted or pleaded guilty of criminal offenses, others show up in DEA files as suspected drug traffickers. If Clinton were mayor of a northern city he would be known as a mob-connected or "mobbed-up" politician.

☞ **The breakdown of law and democracy:** Because of the growing tendency of America's leadership to disregard democracy and its protections, we have arrived at today's political crisis absent what used to be known as the "rule of law." And it's not just Clinton and the White House. The FBI's reputation for probity has been in free fall over the past few years. The CIA is serving as security pimp for US mega-corporations with ever-lessening concern over domestic involvement. The NSA is