Manufacturing Shame: The Danger of Purity

Pandora Hopkins

Abstract

War is so unpopular in the United States that only one member of Congress has a child in the service; the draft is only mentioned in Congress by peaceniks making a point; the President ignores military funerals; and realistic photos of warfare are censored by the media. Why aren’t all the walkers—presumably most citizens but the satisfied minority—making their voices heard? This is the question that haunted me and led me to study the power of sub-truths to block rational understanding. The three general subliminal truths examined in this article have been used to justify: warfare (Pacification, creative destruction, etc.); ethnocentrism (American Exceptionalism); and discrimination (Bloodlines, pure blood, etc.). In different ways, these over-arching themes convey a necessity for purification, and perhaps that is at least partly the reason they often escape critical examination; purification, like humiliation, occupies a sensitive place in the human psyche.

Anyone can go to Baghdad: only really humiliated men go to Tehran.

--not out there in tradition—yet

I really don’t expect to hear this variant of the catch-phrase that was making the rounds in 2003 (Anyone can go to Baghdad: only real men go to Tehran—[or Damascus—or…]). However, some of us have been reminded lately of a statement made by Assistant Secretary of Defense John McNaughton some 40 years ago: “The present objective in Vietnam is to avoid humiliation” (quoted in Schell 1975: 10). More deeply buried in the Pentagon Papers is similar concern about the success of carpet-bombing rural South Vietnamese villages. Chosen as an easy (and safe) show-and-tell to impress the global audience, William Bundy noted only one problem: “We look silly and arouse criticism if these [B-52 raids] do not show significant results” (Gravel 1971: 612).

PART I: HUMILIATION IN SUBLIMINAL TRUTHS

U.S. leaders who believe that perpetual war is the natural state of nation states have been puzzled for some 60 years by something called nuclear paralysis. Unwilling, or unable, to adhere to common wisdom (“Well, we can’t wage war anymore.”), they constantly fall back into what Jonathan Schell once called (during the Vietnam era) a “time of illusion” (Schell 1975). As avoidance of humiliation became a national obsession, conquering small non-nuclear countries has functioned as a kind of “honor killing” for the national family. Michael Ledeen, said to have been Karl Rove’s adviser on international affairs, described the policy graphically at a public lecture back in 1992. He explained: Every ten years or so the United States needs to pick up some crappy little country and throw it against the wall, just to show the world we mean business (Kiernan 2005: 389). Of course, the chosen method for avoiding humiliation has often been to inflict it on someone else. Therefore, according to the Boston Globe (Dec. 11, 2007), recent evidence that Iran had no nuclear bomb program was not met with joy by Bush’s national security team and elicited “a pretty vivid” verbal exchange. The journalist comments that the determination to bomb Iran has a larger purpose than simply to destroy Iran’s bomb-making capacity; it fulfills, “the need to humiliate, would serve a
metaphysical end.” The strategy depends upon theatrical display, public perception (shock and awe?), and when that doesn’t work—well, there’s always the “limited nuclear option” (real or threatened). So far, cooler heads have prevailed, and the U.S. military continue to cover their shame by moving on, somewhat in the manner of diners attending Lewis Carroll’s “mad teaparty” (a perpetual feast whose participants simply rotated around the table, leaving dirty dishes behind).

In the United States today, humiliation is in. Not only has it emerged recently as an integral part of prisoner "interrogation tactics" (i.e., torture), but it has slithered, almost unobserved, into the U.S. legal system which now includes shaming punishments reminiscent of colonial America (Nussbaum 2004; Kahan 1996, 2006).[i] This study, however, is about humiliation as an agent of social control to counteract a trend James Q. Wilson has derided as the evaporation of shame and stigma. He complains: "Our society has managed to stigmatize stigma...." (2002).

Stigmatizing stigma--

Wilson is largely correct. Perhaps no other single factor so distinctively characterizes the lasting influence of the 1960s-1970s counterculture as the rejection of unwanted stereotypes, the stuff from which stigma is usually made. Cutting across all lines of personal identity, the rapid changes in gender mores have been striking: women refusing to be shamed into marriages they didn’t intend, men refusing to be shamed into marching off to wars they didn’t believe in. bell hooks remembers when “…large numbers of young men in this nation rebelled against patriarchy to oppose the war in Vietnam…..” They had to endure ridicule, she points out, for their willingness to challenge accepted notions of patriotism and manliness, intimate feelings normally kept in check by a shaming process (hooks 1996: 71, 146). A large segment of men and women have continued to walk in this direction; they are why the historian Leo Braudy concluded that the only positive result from “the bloodiest century in history” may have been the “visible changes in the definition of being human, particularly in extending it to all races, and to women as well as men” (Braudy 2005; 530). The Swedish sociologist Goran Therborn, in his global analysis of the relationship between sex and power, observes:

Patriarchy, the law of the father, was the big loser of the twentieth century. Probably no other institution has been forced to retreat as much (Therborn 2004: 73).

The egalitarian trend is strong, something that augurs well for global and domestic understanding.

But this societal transformation has not met with the approval of everyone. On the contrary, it is a circumstance that continues to infuriate the warrior mind, and advocates of an authoritarian state have been trying to put the genie back into the bottle ever since. Right-wing “think tanks” have proliferated since the 1970s (a way to avoid standard methods of accreditation for those who can afford it); let’s listen to some of their voices:

- The Demoralization of Society (Gertrude Himmelfarb, 1995)
- Slouching toward Gomorrah (Robert Bork, 1997)
- The Great Disruption (Francis Fukuyama, 2000)
- The Broken Hearth (William J. Bennett, 2001)
- The Death of the West (Patrick Buchanan, 2002)
- The Marketing of Evil (David Kupelian, 2005)
- Godless: The Church of Liberalism (Ann Coulter, 2006)
- State of Emergency….(Buchanan, 2006)

Demoralization--slouching--disruption—broken—death---evil—godless—emergency:

These messages are book titles, speaking openly from the covers of publications. Angry words all--and applicable, one might think, to U.S. economic injustice, the risk of nuclear warfare, the devastation of the AIDS pandemic, or the trashing of natural resources on this planet. But no, they all refer to changing sexual
mores held responsible for a litany of societal ills.

These authors renounce the uninhibited (i.e., non-humiliating) sexual attitudes that have recently taken root in the U.S. as in Europe. They vow to: “bring back the authority of marriage” (Wilson 2002), explain why “we must restigmatize illegitimacy” (Lamm 1997), recommend the use of “illegitimate [as] more accurate than out of wedlock” (Herrnstein and Murray 1994), and believe vasectomy and norplant should be considered for punishing “illegitimate” sexual activity (Buckley 1995). Humiliating words have been resurrected—chastity, virginity, abstinence, bastard, slut, loose—as self-appointed moral guardians blame sexual activity unsanctioned by church or state for virtually all problems of contemporary civilization. Most especially, feminism is blamed, and David Kupelian’s book, The Marketing of Evil, drives the point home with an evocative illustration on its cover: a seductive woman’s hand holding (can you guess?) an apple.

Two sides of the same coin—

What is particularly striking about this right-wing critique is the relating of matters domestic to matters international. The old feminist slogan of the 1970s has become the core of right-wing strategy; for suddenly, the personal has become political. However, it is not a new idea to political scientists. Not only women, but also men, suffer from patriarchy, writes John Hoffman, because “…you cannot write about the relations of women and men without being concerned about power, privilege, hierarchy, violence and the state” (2001:4). In his discussion of “framing,” George Lakoff shows how the “Strict Father Model” of the family implies a host of authoritarian beliefs on international and domestic issues (Lakoff 2004: 6ff). More than a half century ago, Wilhelm Reich tried to make sense of Hitler’s ascendancy by embarking on a detailed analysis of fascism. He concluded that the patriarchal family is “political reaction’s germ cell,” essential to the authoritarian system which must defend it as the basis for the “state, culture and civilization” (1942/1972:104f). Reich pointed out that the wife’s role in the traditional family system requires submission in two ways. In addition to economic dependency, “The wife must not figure as a sexual being but solely as a child-bearer.” Reich explains: “Sexually-awakened women, affirmed and recognized as such, would mean the complete collapse of the authoritarian ideology” (Reich 1942/1972:105; emphasis in the original). That seems to be precisely what has so terrified the imperialist-minded today.

Opportunities and subliminal-truth—

Back in 2000, both the use of tactical nuclear weapons and empire were clearly placed on the table by two publications—an anthology of essays and a formal monograph—that together functioned as a blueprint by and for the Plan for a New American Century (PNAC), published in anticipation of a sympathetic administration (Kagan & Kristo; Donnelly et al).[ii] Their key word is in the subtitle of the anthology, Present Dangers: Crisis and Opportunity in American Foreign Policy. No, it’s not “danger” or even “crisis”: it is opportunity. Claiming that the end of the Cold War had provided the opportunity for (No, not the peace dividend, stupid!): “global hegemony,” the editors described their goal of U.S. world conquest as Pax Americana, their version of Pax Britannica, its version of Pax Romana—wall-to-wall carpeting, from the Wall of Hadrian to the one being built on the Mexican border. Who says these elite folk don’t have folklore?

The triumphant expectation of a New Rome had a “remarkably short shelf live,” wrote Tom Engelhardt in the preface to his updated edition of The End of Victory Culture (Sept., 2007): “…by early 2004, comparisons of United States to Rome and a prospective Pax Americana to the Pax Romana had vanished.” Yes, the formal predictions and proclamations with braggadocio seem to have disappeared, but not their residue in people’s minds; indeed, whether beneficial or not, images of this kind have a half-life roughly equal to that of ziplock bags, as well as a generative ability to elicit a host of other associations.

These images are examples of what I shall call subliminal truths—sub-truths or STs. They include what
the folklorist Alan Dundes named “elements of world view” or “folk ideas,” and share the ability to cross media boundaries; but they are not limited by authenticity and include fallacies and fabrications (Dundes 1972:93).[iii] They can be brought to mind by the way we frame ideas, and George Lakoff’s efficacious test (*Don’t think of an elephant*) may help to uncover them (Lakoff 2004: xvff). However, sub-truths can, but don’t necessarily have to, support our conscious frame, and they don’t necessarily disappear when we reframe our thoughts; indeed, they are able to subvert our intentions subliminally. At a time when an authoritarian government casually admits its consideration of “the nuclear option,” when elected judges believe torture is morally defensible, when the President takes advantage of “signing statements” to trash the Constitution, and when the global environment is in crisis stage, why are only a courageous few raising their voices in protest? Where are all the progressives whose former strength can be gauged by the strength of the backlash against them? There are indications that many of the hesitant are still following a progressive path. Is it possible that their confidence is blocked by “truths” so obvious that it has never been considered necessary to examine them?

It is this last possibility that concerns me: I am unabashedly preaching to the choir—but only to those choristers who know but have not yet raised their voices—are walking but not talking, so to speak. Thus, I consider both the term, *Pax Americana*, and all the associations it generates to be sub-truths. To reject empire, for example, is easy. To reject *Pax Americana* is also not a problem on the intellectual level—but perhaps not unencumbered with doubts on the complex subliminal one.

In the United States, there exists today an extraordinary disjunction between the way most citizens are living their lives and the policies of their elected representatives. According to a NBC/Wall Street Journal National poll (June 8, 2007), only 19% of U.S. citizens think the country is headed in the right direction. While the President’s rating is at an all-time low, the latest CNN/ORC national survey (June 29, 2007) found dissatisfaction with the performance of the present Congress as well (49% dissatisfied, 42% satisfied). Nonetheless, respondents favored having a Democrat-controlled Congress over a Republican one (57% to 31%). Clearly, these facts are significant; they indicate extreme cynicism toward the democratic process as it functions in the country, as well as strong disapproval of present Republican leadership. The Republican party is in disarray; some of the prime movers of Iraq war policy have recanted, some have left government service, some have challenged the direction the party has taken, and some have changed their allegiance.[iv] The Democratic Congress, instead of profiting from this circumstance, has not been able to agree on a strategy to implement the will of their constituents, few of whom are responding with conviction.

War is so unpopular that only one member of Congress has a child in the service; the draft is only mentioned in Congress by peaceniks making a point; the President ignores military funerals; and realistic photos of warfare are censored by the media. Why aren’t all the walkers—presumably most citizens but the satisfied 19 percent—making their voices heard? This is the question that haunted me and led me to study the power of sub-truths to block rational understanding.

Parts II of this article consists of three sub-truths that are powerful in generating other similar concepts. They are not put forth as the only, the best or the most representative of their kind, nor can I claim to have covered all the associations they might conjure up; virtually each one, of course, could easily be accorded a full volume of text. Thus the information presented under each rubric is not systemic but may be regarded as a sampling of the kind of facts one must gather in order to understand where the mind might be led. At least so far as these three examples are concerned, however, there is one clear message: a strong association with the principle of purification, a periodic cleansing of dirt or disorder (what some religious people call “evil.”). While most clearly evident in such terms as creative destruction and surgical strike, we shall find this idea an active component of the other STs described here—from pacification to American exceptionalism, from bloodline to virginity. The possibilities of using a strategy of humiliation to inflame unconscious assumptions of purification are, of course, obvious.

**PART II A: PACIFICATION**
Creative destruction, surgical strike, ethnic cleansing, total war-----

All of the above are recent improvisations on what has been called “the art of war” at least since the days of Sun Tzu twenty-five hundred years ago. They are also sub-truths that convey individually different associations (some emphasizing growth and progress while others lean more toward order and restoration). At the same time, they tend to imply normalcy: warfare may be uncomfortable, perhaps, but necessary, like cleaning your house. Of course, this kind of house-cleaning involves sweeping away, not dust, but groups of people—categories of individuals that disgust you—or simply are on that other team. “Long after purging blood had faded away as a purging practice, it still seemed right for the body politic” (Braudy 374).

The purging function of war can easily reverberate under the level of consciousness, even to a peace-worker—perhaps bringing up a more humble concept as well: If it hurts [or tastes bad], it must be good for you; it is the kind of sub-truth Dundes called a folk-idea (Dundes 1972: 98). All of these terms share the concepts of domination, order, progress, definition—attributes traditionally associated with masculinity.

There you go with that fucking hand again. You look like a fucking pansy!
--G.H.W.Bush being groomed as a presidential nominee (qted in Ducat 2004:84)

Like Theodore Roosevelt long before him, Bush Sr., in 1988, had to work hard to manufacture the manliness that was expected of presidential aspirants; he was never as successful as his son, who had the advantage of spending summer vacations on his father’s Texas “ranch.” Teddy, who, as a 23-year-old New York State Assemblyman, had been taunted by such humiliating names as “pumpkin-lily” and “weakling,” managed the transformation successfully; he also bought a ranch (Ducat 2004: 78). The first Roosevelt was held up as a model by Kagan and Kristol in their introduction to Present Dan gers. Roosevelt, they wrote, had known how to toughen up an America grown “effete” through too much peace and prosperity. In their view, the 1990s were a similarly “squandered decade” during which Americans had been “lavishing the gifts of an illusory ‘peace dividend’ upon themselves and frittering away the opportunity to strengthen and extend a natural order uniquely favorable to the United States.” The PNAC spokespersons admire Roosevelt’s “contempt” for global peace-workers and refer to the “burden” they believe the U.S. is fated to carry, a not-so-veiled allusion to their hero’s “white man’s burden”(Kagan 2000).

Creative destruction is a concept with a pedigree especially associated with neocon Michael Ledeen who does not hide his disdain for other cultures (see above, p.2). Ledeen’s much-quoted passage from The War Against the Terror Masters (2002) begins: “Creative destruction is our middle name.” He did not originate the term; it had been used, a half century before, in the field of economics (Schumpeter1975: 194, 82-85) and later in political science by Andrew Heywood who wrote “…despite an undoubted inclination toward nihilism, war and death, fascism saw itself as a creative force, a means of constructing a new civilization through “creative destruction” (1992/2003). Ledeen’s own interest in Italian fascism is well documented by early publications, including his doctoral dissertation (Laughland 2002).

Surgical Strike: Jane’s Information Group website, the global information source for military technology, asserts that the magical precision generally accorded this concept is “a myth” (their words). Jane’s does not mention its metaphoric value for generating sub-truths.

Ethnic cleansing: This translation of the Serbo-Croatian etnièko èišæenje, is a new way of saying genocide: the deliberate creation of a genetically “pure” society through elimination or displacement of a particular (or all but one) ethnic group. It was widely used by U.S. media in the early 1990s to describe ethnic conflagrations during the break-up of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, but the concept is not new and dates back to at least the Second World War. A rabidly racist, anti-semitic, anti-hispanic computer game by this name was put on the market by Resistance Records in 2002—to be followed by sequels and another
entire line of equally racist games. Thus the combination of cleansing and warfare can come early to young minds. Combined with such concepts as “creative destruction” and “surgical strike,” it can reinforce the idea of progress through warfare against “inferior races.”

**Total War:** The year 2000, we all recall, marked the shift to a radical U.S. administration. Video game buffs may also remember the year for a new series called *Total War*. The first game, *Shogun: Total War* was soon followed by *Medieval: Total War*; then *Rome: Total War, Medieval II: Total War*, and *Spartan Total Warrior*.

If we just let our vision of the world go forth, and we embrace it entirely and we don’t try to piece together clever diplomacy, but just wage a total war...our children will sing songs about us years from now (Richard Perle quoted in Pilger 2002: 9).

There was no greater influence on the present Bush’s Middle East policy than the shadowy Richard Perle whose advocacy for military involvement goes back a quarter century to when he was President Reagan’s Assistant Secretary of Defense. In 2004, his 17-year membership on the Defens Policy Board Advisory Committee (1997-2004) was finally terminated over conflict of interest problems related to his international military investments: Perle’s precarious balancing act had long given him the kind of swashbuckling mystique of the anti-hero, an image that once earned him the title, Prince of Darkness. Today, he sings a different tune: “…if I had been Delphic…I think now I would have said, No, let’s consider other strategies.” (Rose 2006). Whether his children will sing his epic song is uncertain.

The term total war is not a random choice of words: there are echoes from the past, especially from Prussian military history. The term was famously analyzed by the Prussian World War I general Erich Ludendorff in his book, *Der totale Krieg* (pub. 1935). The total war concept reflected novel circumstances--both technological and sociological--that had manifested themselves by the turn of the twentieth century when war waging required an extension of venue beyond the battle-field; indeed, the safety zone had disappeared as weapons took to the air; women (especially in the second world war) manned war plants; and the location of factories made many parts of residential areas military targets (see Chickering 2005).

Some of the ramifications are all too familiar today. In this scenario, “everyone is a combatant and anyone without a uniform may be suspect until proven loyal” (Braudy 461). Telling misleading tales becomes an essential part of war strategy, as Joseph Goebbels knew when he became Hitler’s first minister of propaganda. Trying to revitalize loyal followers after Stalingrad, Goebbels entreated his loyal followers: “The total war effort has become a matter of the entire German people.” Despite relegation of women to kinder, (kuche, und kirche), he used humiliation to shame housewives into exchanging the home for the war plant or to "rethink household help" to free their maids for the purpose. Otherwise, "people will despise you" (Goebbels 1944/1998). As the behavior of all citizens concerns the government, contemporary total warriors demand control, not only of military operations, but also the media, library, campus and bedroom. Those disloyal to the team should feel shame. “Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists.”

**Crusade: a religious interpretation of pacification--**

"This crusade, this war on terrorism..." After 9/11, James Carroll, reacted with horror to President Bush’s image of a holy war that justifies: "… risks of world-historic proportioned disaster, since the ultimate outcome of such a conflict is to be measured not by actual consequences on this earth but by the earth-transcending will of God." Like Jonathan Schell, Carroll finds warfare today a dangerous illusion: "Our war on terrorism, before it is anything else, is thus an imagined conflict, taking place primarily in a mythic realm beyond history" (2004:8).

Why then, was there no general outcry amongst the presumably large number of U.S. citizens who understood the danger of evoking such a shameful event almost on its millenial anniversary? We can easily
imagine that many experienced a yearning on some level for purification, especially those most afflicted with American exceptionalism. As the newscasters chanted their mantra, “But it can’t happen here!” Pat Robertson and Jerry Falwell took advantage of the opportunity to humiliate their least favorite citizens: Yes, it can happen in New York City—to feminists, gays, members of the ACLU and People for the American Way.

PART II B: AMERICAN EXCEPTIONALISM

How We Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Pax Americana

--Paul Wolfowitz

The title of Paul Wolfowitz’s contribution to Present Dangers (Kagan & Kristol 2000) parodies that of the Kubrick-Sellers film: Dr. Strangelove, Or How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb. According to the political scientist Anne Norton, the title promotes the acceptance of nuclear warfare in the kind of coded message Leo Strauss believed ancient Greek philosophers devised to communicate with one another (2004: 192). Perhaps it was Wolfowitz’s bow to two University of Chicago professors, not only Strauss but also nuclear-war researcher Albert Wohlstetter whose RAND connection headed Wolfowitz toward government service.

The preponderance of “arms and the man” in pagan Rome explains why the Romans were less in need of “others” for their defense…(Strauss 1958/1978:205f).

The influence of Leo Strauss’s ideas on the present administration through his students (and students of students) has been well documented (Drury 1999, 1988/2005, and 2005). Strauss’s main themes—especially war as the norm to maintain an orderly society, and rule by the few who manipulate (organize) the masses through “noble” lies (see Schmitt and Shulsky 1999: 410) including the exploitation of religion and the refusal to negotiate with “others”—have provided credibility for contemporary doctrines.

Especially relevant to the inhibiting capabilities we have posited for subliminal messages is Nicolas Xenos’s belief that Strauss’s most troubling influence is on discourse at large. Xenos speaks of a “war of images” and points to examples of self-described liberals who promote the use of the word “tyranny” or approve of teaching “a new kind of patriotism” or join in the attack on campus liberals: “A fearful liberalism and a political and punditry elite have been fertile ground for Straussian seeding” (Xenos 2004).

To be autonomous, militarily strong enough not to need “others”: that, in short, describes U.S. international policy today. The journalist/historian William Pfaff recently pointed out that the U.S. justifies its aggressive military tactics, from preemptive war to torture “by making the claim that it possesses an exceptional status among nations…” (Pfaff 1970). Most U.S citizens, in one way or another, have absorbed the founding narrative—the “discovery” of a “new world” and “chosen people” who, tested by a hazardous crossing, tamed the wilderness by expanding the size and power of the country, from east to west, frontier to frontier. Rationalized as Manifest Destiny, its main subliminal message is the identification of progress with growth, acquisition, materialism and associated sub-truths, including racism and determinism. While the concept is not unique to this country, it seems to have become a main feature of U.S. world view. Alan Dundes has identified it as a nation-wide “folk idea,” and points to the wide currency of such common expressions as “the sky’s the limit” and “there’s (plenty) more where that came from.” He names this “the principle of unlimited good” (Dundes 1972: 96ff). It is probably significant that the notion of progress grafted onto Darwinian evolutionary theory by the Englishman Herbert Spenser (who invented the term “survival of the fittest”) made the theory more acceptable on the American side of the ocean than on his own (Hofstadter 1944/55: 39).

From settlement days to the present, the Roman analogy has proven to be wonderfully malleable; it can be used as a metaphor for pagan or Christian, triumph or failure, republic or empire. While the imperial model is exhilarating to some, it has become a grim cautionary fable to others (Murphy 2007). The prescient historian Chalmers Johnson, who published Blowback the year before the World Trade Center was
attacked, warned: "Roman imperial sorrows mounted up over hundreds of years. Ours are likely to arrive with the speed of FedEx." Iraq became the 14th government to be overthrown by the United States in a 110-year span, something no “nation in modern history has done … so often, in so many places so far from its own shores”; the end of U.S. imperialism may be headed for speed-up, too (Kinzer 2006).

Tom Englehardt describes the initial U.S. reaction to the collapse of the Soviet Union as “the kind of befuddlement and paralysis one would usually have associated with loss.” In stark contrast, after the 9/11 attacks, he noted that the same officials came to life with startling speed and “… spooked a traumatized nation into a series of wars that were to make the United States the planet’s New Rome…. “In the process, they reintroduced the old American tradition of triumphalism (“victory culture”),and, especially relevant to our theme, brought back “much of its language and many of its images” from the early glory days of Vietnam (Engelhardt 1995/2006). By 2006, “Victory Culture” had disappeared, along with references to the New Rome.

As Jonathan Schell points out, the U.S. “could not be and cannot now be a new Rome, much less greater than Rome because it cannot do what Rome did.” Once again Schell points to the illusory nature of warfare in a nuclear age: “It cannot, in a post-imperial age, conquer other countries and absorb them into a great empire (Schell 2006).

Only by appreciating the depth of the subliminal truths associated with the acquisitive definition of progress can we begin to understand the extent of the wrath against a different kind of progress that came into prominence in the 1960s and some Americans continue to champion. Let’s go back in time to the days when these new ideas began to bear fruit.

**Challenging American Exceptionality---**

**History--the founding--chosen people-multipculturalism—feminism--**

_South Africa had no history, y’know, until we came there; after all, they had no written document—_South African professor

It was sometime in the early 1960s, and the visiting professor from South Africa was chatting during a reception held in his honor at a Connecticut college. He was expressing the accepted view of the era—that time itself ceases to exist without written documentation. As I wrote later, “Much as certain European philosophers ‘bracketed’ the question of existence, social scientists, reacting against unproductive searches for authenticity or ultimate origins, have set aside the historical perspective in their areas of research” (Hopkins 1986: 35). But there was beginning to be a break-through: “The problem now is to explode the concept of history by the anthropological experience of culture….The heretofore histories of remote islands deserve a place alongside the self-contemplation of the European past or the history of ‘civilizations’…” (Sahlins 1983: 534). At a time when historians and social scientists had become painfully aware of cultural insularity, a crosscultural comprehension of history was beginning to evolve that depended upon a deeper and richer understanding of the transmission process itself: “Suddenly, there are all kinds of new things to consider” (Sahlins 534). He referred to fruit born from novel approaches to scholarship derived from the increasingly multicultural character of the campuses during the 1960s and 1970s; and Lawrence Levine similarly enthused that the new heterogeneity on campus produced “…a flowering of ideas and scholarly innovation unmatched in history” (Levine 1996:28).

**Healthy nation-building myths [vs] Dangerous quests for the complicated truth--**


Not everyone was overjoyed. Indeed, the new ideas clashed with the U.S. founding myth. The _New York Times_ columnist Richard Bernstein decried educators’ efforts to “demystify” Columbus, “our William the Conqueror, our Joan of Arc, our Alexander Nevsky,” in an attempt to “replace healthy nation-building myths with dangerous quests for the complicated truth” (quoted in Levine 1996: 19f). Allan Bloom wrote:
“Cultural relativism succeeds in destroying the West’s universal or intellectually imperialistic claims, leaving it to be just another culture….The United States is one of the highest and most extreme achievements of the rational quest for the good life….What makes its political structure possible is the use of the rational principles of natural right to found a people...” (Bloom 1987: 39).

Bloom’s best-seller, The Closing of the American Mind, was one of a series of publications, from the Reagan years to the present, to chant a constant litany of reaction; handsomely subsidized by right-wing foundations, they were usually given major review space in prominent periodicals. Hot off the vanity press of the elite, these texts glowingly presented the case for resurrecting rigid moral codes, canons, family/societal/ national hierarchies—all from a “Western” perspective (as though the hemisphere—or the country—had ever consisted of a single culture). They complained that multiculturalism reduces “Western culture” to an unexceptional state, only one amongst many cultures in the world.

The turbulence of the 1960s and 1970s brought a wide diversity of ethnicities and both genders to most campuses, largely accomplished by changing admissions criteria from privilege to merit. But it produced more than a diversity of students; they brought with them a broader range of different kinds of interests and knowledge and the self-confidence to promote these things as worthy of serious study. It interfered with the style of those who demanded complete professorial deference. Paul Wolfowitz, as a Cornell undergraduate, was at least as much influenced by Allan Bloom as later at Chicago by Leo Strauss and the nuclear war theorist Alan Wohlstetter. At Cornell, Wolfowitz was one of Bloom's "blossoms," as he called his cultish circle of male students who lived in the college he administered as Head Master. Leo Strauss called his circle of favored students "puppies" and apparently did nothing to stop the formation of what came to be called “Straussian truth squads,” bands of students who would interrupt classes to interrogate non-Straussian professors (Norton 2004: 58f and 44f). Today, the organization, Campus Watch, is a successor.

For professors who expected this kind of reverence, the new diversity was not welcome. Allan Bloom yearned for the days when “A significant number of students used to arrive at the university physically and spiritually virginal…” and complained that Harvard, Yale and Princeton were no longer “…the last resorts of aristocratic sentiment within the democracy" (89). For some of us, however, it was an exciting time to be involved. In 1965, R. Inslee Clark was brought to Yale University as director of undergraduate admissions. He instituted a more democratic policy, something accomplished through slashing the number of private school students from 50% to 38% of the Freshman class, offering more scholarship money and making intellectual merit a higher criterion than family ties (Lever and Schwartz 1971: 23ff).

I was teaching at Yale in 1968 during “Coeducation Week,” a demonstration by male students determined to open the doors to women, and I remember a sense of exhilaration when the administration responded favorably. Allan Bloom would not have approved of my assignment at the university: to structure a program in world music, i.e., to enlarge the scope of musical traditions taught beyond central European elite music. During the spring semester of 1970, a student strike that brought the entire university to a halt in support of Bobby Seale and the other Black Panthers who were being tried in a New Haven court. In response to student activism, however, the administration retracted its liberal admissions policies, retreating to privilege over merit. Messages in our faculty mailboxes announced new rules to attract “more alumnae children”: lowering the required grade point average and awarding fewer scholarships would guarantee “safer students,” so we were informed.

The diverging societal views on campus were, in miniature, a harbinger of what we famously have come to know as a “culture war” in the United States (see Hunter 1992).

The Humiliated unexceptional—:
“I am male, white, Protestant and live in an upscale suburb. What have I got to contribute?”

It was the 1970s: The anthropologist speaking these words had created a highly influential multicultural
program; yet he admitted to feelings of guilt. During the intervening years—as more and more attention has been given to the accomplishments of “others”—some of his less thoughtful brothers have shown scant interest in meditating on the problem. Their rhetoric often seems to display a kind of defiant hubris—of great danger because, as Donald C. Klein has pointed out, humiliation has the tendency to initiate a cycle: “When it comes to humiliation, ‘evil begets evil’” (Klein 2006: 66). German citizens, smarting from resentment against World War I economic reprisals, were vulnerable to political mind-manipulation, quite ready to believe that their misery was due, not to practical difficulties, but to victimization for not being permitted to occupy the superior positions to which they felt entitled. Evelin Lindner concludes that Hitler’s unquestioning followers were enticed by a modern-day pied piper “… not as willing executioners but as willing partners in seduction” (2006: 81; emphasis in original; also see Klein 2006: 89ff). However, most German citizens, accustomed to a humble position in an hierarchical society, went about their daily routine unconcerned about the national humiliation inflicted upon them by the Treaty of Versailles—until Hitler “explained” the situation to them (2006:81).

The real economic problems faced recently by many average American citizens have made them susceptible to “explanations.” In the official U.S. narrative, of course, the “specter of Vietnam” (not the outsourcing of jobs or nonexistence of health care) is the preferred Versaille shame for victimization. Thus, Americans were expected to feel proud at the end of the first Gulf War because: By God, we’ve kicked the Vietnam syndrome once and for all!

--George H. W. Bush speaking to a group of legislators

The meaning of Vietnam syndrome has been turned upside down. Originally used in reference to a pathological condition (Vietnam vets unable—Lady-Macbeth-like—to wash away guilt and anguish), it emerged from a Nixon-era laundering process as a dysfunctional inability to “give war a chance” (see O’Rourke 1992/1993)—another upside-down slogan that has turned John Lennon’s plaintive song into a mantra for the carnage that purifies. Thus, incessant rhetoric (aided and abetted by revisionist films as well as pop songs and video games) has created a new kind of exceptionality for the United States, a U.S.-as-victim legend, its citizens supposedly filled with shame for a nation that had justified Nixon’s worst fears and become a “helpless, pitiful giant.”

When news broke that humiliation was being used on detainees in Abu Ghraib, there was a sense of revulsion among those who had believed the war “would redeem America”: And most of all, we’d be welcomed as the Good Guys, putting to rest the shame of Vietnam.

Nathana Newman, the director of Agenda For Justice complains: “…Suddenly we are back in Vietnam, ashamed of our soldiers, ashamed of our political leaders who have put those soldiers in such terrible places that they’d do such terrible things” (NathanNewman.org: 20). As was the case in Nazi Germany, the seductive fantasies of exceptionality resonate with those citizens fighting the reality of economic hardship: As a white male, I feel part of a group that has been singled out and victimized without cause.

-- National Coalition of Free Men

Over the past several decades, a new victim has emerged: White men, once unmarked in the linguistic sense, obtained a distinctive characteristic—that of being shunted aside for being privileged. Gradually, the distinction of victimhood has created a feeling of identity and a new discipline, whiteness studies.

The author of Invisible Victims: White Males and the Crisis of Affirmative Action blamed a Republican president, Nixon, for extending affirmative action and thus “crippling the careers of white males” (Lynch 1989). More recently, the Democratic President Clinton was called a hypocrite for expressing sympathy for victims of his own policies (Digbe 2003). In 2003, Donahue devoted a week of TV time to “Angry White Men”. The most powerful religion in the country convened a two-day conference in Washington called “War on Christians and the Values Voters of 2006,” the first day of which was devoted to “persecution of Christians in the U.S. and Canada” (Cooperman 2006: A12). Some thrive on humiliation, actually provoking and perpetuating acts of humiliation to avenge the humiliation they have—or fancy they
have—suffered. “War and genocide may result when such personalities gain power and tap into the reservoir of frustration and humiliation among potential followers” (Lindner 2006; 140; 127ff).

Victimhood, is a kind of exceptionality; it permits one to stand out from the crowd, perhaps even to extend one’s prominence beyond one’s mortal lifespan. Yearning for notoriety not infrequently makes innocents claim guilt, as a frustrated criminal attorney recently testified. She was explaining the actions of John Mark Karr, the man who claimed to be the killer of JonBenet Ramsey. A friend of Karr explained: “He obsesses. He wanted to be a rock star one time. He’s a dreamer. He’s the kind of guy who wants to be famous” (Lacayo 2006; Sarche-a 2006 and Sarche-b 2006)

She-o-cracy, feminazis, the Latino population breeds like rabbits, left-wing pinko vermin... (Savage Nation)

Perhaps Michael A. Weiner (popularly known as “Savage”) is the ultimate example of victim claiming; this king of airwaves bigotry who draws five million listeners on 300 radio stations, ascribes to affirmative action his failure to obtain a permanent academic position: For here I was, a “manchild in the promised land,” denied my birthright for matters of race. Mr. Weiner holds a Ph.D.; interestingly, he chose “birthright” rather than certification for his argument.

Humiliation, especially the fear of it, is strong medicine; accepting humiliation—internalization of it—makes one ashamed of oneself. The breach of obedience to any recognized authority can put someone in danger of humiliation, producing a fear so strong that many will act against conscience to avoid it. Clearly, the U.S. leadership today feels humiliated—and not just because of a past (and present) inglorious war effort but also because it has seen its “rightful” dominant position threatened by rapid social change during the last half century.

**PART II C: BLOOD**

--Bloodlines & biobabble—virginity—the unfit 10%—the absent mother—the undeserving poor

...this idea of America as a creedal nation bound together not by “blood or birth or soil” but by “ideals” that must be taught and learned.... Demonstrably, this is false. (Buchanan 2006: 145f).

A people’s cultural level does not at any time... provide a standard for measuring the quality of the state in which it lives.... there is only one holiest human right... to wit: to see to it that the blood is preserved pure.........(Hitler 1925/71: 402)

Racism, of the Nazi, full-blooded type, is alive and well in 21st century U.S.A. Buchanan, like Hitler, considers true citizenship a matter of “blood,” not “creedal ideals” like equality or democracy that an immigrant can learn. Just as Adolf Hitler blamed open national boundaries for “poisonings of the blood” of his Master Race (Hitler 1925/71:396), Buchanan today promotes the construction of a 2,000 mile fence on the Mexican border “defining, sealing, and securing it for ever” (254) against an “invasion of...immigrants of another kind” (i.e., Mexicans) who are now on the point of causing “the death of the West” (Buchanan 2006: 270).

Buchanan’s xenophobic harangue was fueled by the U.N.’s revised assessment of global population growth—a forecast of eventual depopulation that agrees with the long-range demographic trend predicted by Ben Wattenberg 20 years ago in Birth Dearth (1987). The paleoconservative, isolationist Buchanan and the neconservative Wattenberg hold opposing views on U.S. imperialism, and Wattenberg criticizes those who would put an end to immigration--indeed favoring the entrance of a limited number of Mexican immigrants. However, the differences are more apparent than real: the United States, which Wattenberg calls “an exemplar nation,” is destined to lead the world; he explains that an “exemplar nation” needs a robust military—and praises the past record of Mexican foot soldiers (Wattenberg 2004).

Neither agree with environmentalists and social egalitarians who have been pleasantly surprised by the prospect of an eventually smaller planet (see Seager 2004). Indeed both condemn what they see as selfish
northern-European-type women making career choices instead of babies (of the right ethnicity). State control over men’s and women’s bodies for military and demographic (i.e., racist) policies is not a new story: it is where racism and classism meet sexism. The philosopher Michel Foucault, in analyzing attempts over the past two centuries to incorporate sexual conduct into state political/economic systems, has pointed to a connection with the different varieties of racism that have erupted (Foucault 1978/1990: 26f). A century after Theodore Roosevelt blamed “emancipated women’s willful sterility,” for “race suicide,” (Longman 2004), Patrick Buchanan wrote: ‘Western women are terminating their pregnancies at a rate that represents autogenocide for peoples of European ancestry…. (Buchanan 2002).

Bloodlines, blood feuds, half bloods, pureblood, blood royal, bad blood, good blood, English blood, blueblood, red-blooded--

Blood is indeed an evocative word, and the subliminal truths it has disseminated over the years have often conveyed two biological fallacies—first, that blood is somehow integral to inheritance, and secondly, that the paternal “bloodline” is of major or sole importance in this process (Montagu 1997: 366f). One can understand the appeal to authoritarian governments; they have always been on the lookout for deterministic justification for human differences. But Buchanan was old-fashioned in using the blood metaphor; recently, these associations come more commonly transmuted into what some biologists call the “gene myth”:

Genetic determinism is one of the most persistent myths in Western science. I think it goes back to the idea of noble birth and bloodlines that must have helped ruling classes retain power within families
--- Mae-Wan Ho, biologist and Fellow of the National Genetics Foundation, 2005:

In 1994, James Watson, the first director of the Human Genome Project, discarded cold objectivity when he rhapsodized: “We used to think that our fate was in the stars. Now we know, in large measure, our fate is in our genes.” (Jaroff 1989: 67). Other biologists felt such expectations were exaggerated, based on what one called biobabble, and others termed the Holy Grail of Genetics, the medical crystal ball, a Delphic Oracle, as well as the gene myth (Hubbard 1999; Nelkin 1995). In February, 2001, the project’s completion was announced: “The outcome of the Human Genome Project has spelled “the death of genetic determinism” (Ho 2001). A similar undertaking by a private company—and in competition with the government’s HGP--came to the same conclusion at the same time; its director reported: “The wonderful diversity of the human species is not hard-wired in our genetic code. Our environments are critical…. [Therefore] race is a social concept, not a scientific one “(quoted in Lewontin 2005).

Despite these findings, biological determinism in general and the “gene myth” in particular have not disappeared. Watson, now the head of Cold Spring Harbor Laboratories, spoke to a British film crew in 2000 about “the bottom ten percent” whom he labeled “stupid… I would call that a disease” (Black 2003: 442). The very term “bottom ten percent,” of course, conjures up associations with the Nazi “Final Solution” and the U.S. sterilization program that directly influenced it. At one time, during the first half of the twentieth century, Cold Spring Harbor was the center for eugenics experimentation in the U.S., a program that focused on “bettering” native stock by elimination of the “unfit ten percent” (Black 2003: 442). Watson and the other scientists who believe in genetic enhancement are eagerly ushering in a “brave new world” in which, just as in Huxley’s novel, a fabricated concept of heredity could become the basis for the ultimate hierarchical system; not found in the natural world of biology, it is possible to achieve in the world of dollars and technology, a complete ranking of citizens, and control from prenatal existence until death.

--A Tangle of Humiliation--
Work opportunity—personal responsibility—Dependent—Welfare Queen—Nanny State—single moms—virgin—chastity—intact family-wage—dead-beat dads—illegitimate--
Why can’t you learn to keep your legs together?
--social worker to Teresa Norton at routine welfare appointment

Welfare “reform” became law in 1996, and caused a nationwide exodus of students from public colleges. More than 18,000 students (mostly single moms) had to drop out of the City University of New York (CUNY), forced to give up their dreams for a better future in favor of temporary, menial jobs (Lewis 1999; Emsellem 1997). Teresa Norton (not her real name) was exceptionally fortunate in being able to continue studying for a degree at CUNY; she had received special permission to have her job as department secretary count as work toward public assistance. A brilliant student and editor of the college paper, Norton was raising—not only her own two children—but a young niece as well. Still, she had to put up with humiliation. “I could not believe that a woman would talk to me like that,” Teresa told me.

I ask you, what am I? I’m one of the undeserving poor, that’s what I am….But my needs is as great as the most deserving widow’s….I don’t need less than a deserving man: I need more. I don’t eat less hearty than him, and I drink a lot more.–Pygmalion

Thus George Bernard Shaw, through his character the Welshman Alfred Doolittle, ridiculed the ideology that the poor should be purer than the rest of us. In the play, Professor Higgins, impressed by the rustic philosopher’s eloquent common sense, introduces him to an American friend who invites him to give lectures in the new democracy; lionized by U.S. society, Doolittle inherits a small fortune from a rich American admirer—and, to his chagrin, has to adopt “middle class morality,” a state that includes marrying Eliza’s mother.

Shaw gave the United States too much credit. In fact, crafters of the first U.S. welfare legislation, “The Mothers’ Pension Program”—at about the same time the play was written—also had those deserving (white) widows (of noble military heroes) in mind, a circumstance that didn’t change until the Social Security program of 1935 shifted state largesse to federal benefits and support became more widely distributed. Consternation set in when as increased numbers of African-American moms sought help in bringing up their families, increased agitation when it was broadcast that many were single, never-married mothers. Although there continued to be more white beneficiaries than black ones, the influx of African-Americans touched off a media blitz that has continued to evoke sexist-racist rhetoric.

Sparked by images of Reagan’s “welfare queen” the teen-age single mom became the most demonized member of U.S. society. Charles Murray marvels at the nerve of the single mom who proposes, “Help me find a job and daycare for my children, and I will take care of the rest.” In effect, Murray fumes, “she puts herself in the same category as the widow or the deserted wife—identifies herself as one of the most deserving of the deserving poor” (Murray 1984: 231). Murray’s co-authored book published just before welfare “reform” became law, “proves” that the single mother is, not only the least deserving, but also the least intelligent because “having a baby without a husband is a dumb thing to do” (Herrnstein 1994).

According to psychologist Stefan Ducat “anxious masculinity” has affected the U.S. political scene since the 1980 election when, right-wing propagandists successfully began to link liberalism to weakness, dependency, and helplessness—and made a connection to “the emergence of the feminizing maternal menace of the welfare state, [Ronald Reagan’s]… great myth that our national nanny knows best.” Ducat believes this line of thinking carried to “logical, if psychotic extreme” led to the bombing of the Oklahoma City Federal Building.” Amongst the various government agencies it targeted was a day-care center: “a very lethal, as well as bluntly symbolic assault on the ‘nanny state’” (Ducat 2004: 6). Dependency in the United States, Ducat points out, is a subjective concept and has been increasingly regarded as a feminine condition—to be applauded in the case of wives, and derided in the case of single moms whose independence then becomes threatening. Curiously, he points out, it is never attributed to husbands of the stay-at-home wives who service them, or to what he calls “the other AFDC (Aid For Dependent Corporations) (Ducat 2004: 187f).

The very essence of the male animal, from the bantam rooster to the four-star general, is to strut…. 
Welfare “reform” has a pedigree. It was a practical implementation of a blueprint by Robert Rector (1995) who used the recommendations of Charles Murphy (1984) that depended upon Daniel Patrick Moynihan’s tangle of pathology theory (Moynihan 1967)--the name taken from sociologist Kenneth Clark and the concept a redo of the “culture of poverty” theories of Oscar Lewis, Edward Banfield, Franklin Frazier, and others. Moynihan’s Report, published in 1967, presented the high-achieving African-American mother as emasculating her sons: The very essence of the male animal, from the bantam rooster to the four-star general, is to strut….U.S. society “presumes” male leadership in private and public affairs. However, Moynihan seems not to have had generalships, but more modest military positions, in mind for African-American youth—if only their overachieving moms wouldn’t stand in the way. Like Wattenberg (as noted above for Mexicans) he sees a win-win situation: more soldiers for the country and a disciplined life for youth who would profit especially from “a world without women; a world run by strong men of unquestionable authority…”(Moynihan 1967: 127ff).

Suddenly, the real difficulties experienced by inner city African-American men were not due to systemic social inadequacies (drug-ridden streets, unemployment, racial prejudice) but the result of “mother-headed” families—a convenient way to transfer social problems to the shoulders of the individual. At a time when young men were unashamed to wear their hair long and shout: “Hell, no! I won’t go,” it was useful to bring in what Stephan Ducat calls the “wimp factor.” With one flourish of his pen, so to speak, Moynihan managed to humiliate both men and women in the African-American family—and to pit them against each other: Neither the mother herself nor African-Americans in general could take pride in her success any longer—for wasn’t that very thing destroying her son? Worst of all, he was now officially designated an “unmanly man” by the dominant culture openly flaunting its gender pathology as a natural right.

Moynihan is a hero to the social engineers manufacturing manly men today. The complement to the concept of the male as essentially a military machine is the female as essentially a breeder, yes, the same mother that the manly man must escape from. Let’s have a look at a dramatization of the approved role for (at least middle-class) women according to fundamentalist Christians today:

The Covenant of Purity and Protection--

Contemporary Christian evangelicals, trying to turn the clock back to a time when female sexual ignorance was virtuous, have recently invented the “Purity Ball,” an elegant and costly ritual that was performed in at least 40 states during the last year. Tuxedoed dads escort their daughters (from about 9 or 10 years of age through teens) on the only date they are allowed to have before marriage—a sort of mock wedding ceremony replete with wedding cake, ring and formal dress. The dads—who are designated “high priests in their homes”—sign a “Covenant of Purity and Protection” as they slip “purity rings” on their daughters’ fingers and vow to “war” for the chastity of their “princesses.” The daughters pledge abstinence until marriage, and there is dancing with dad (Stange 2007). The images are all recognizable: chastity as purity, the absent mother, the princess daughter, the high priest dad, wedding cake and ring, a pledge, a test, fathers vowing to defend family honor with military allusions, passive child-women ceding individual autonomy to their fathers while waiting for the ever-after ending to each individual fairy-tale.

The Purity Ball is a dramatization of a sub-truth with a very long cultural pedigree: the paradoxical virgin-mother ideal. It is implicit in the “ever-after” conclusions of most fairy tales and all those novels that end with the wedding, the end of chastity and purity for the heroine. Literary analysts have puzzled over the “absent mother” theme in literature, and mom is conspicuously absent from the traditional Christian wedding ceremony. The father gives the bride to the husband to whom she cedes her individual identity by assuming his name; there is an entourage of males and females in waiting—but no particular role for the mother of the bride. Since her purpose in this society is to become a mother, the “princess” is adored for
promising to put off what she is destined to become. “It is not hard to see how every fundamentalism is driven, at base, by a defense of purity. And, for men in such a world, the feminine is often the greatest impurity that evokes the greatest anxiety. Conscious and unconscious links are made between women (especially their bodies) and filth” (Ducat 2004: 219).

**Trickle-Up Morality**—

One third of the U.S. HIV budget goes to public school courses that teach abstention from sex until marriage—and are only permitted to mention contraceptives negatively. These classes lack educational merit according to objective studies (including an investigation by Rep. Henry Waxman in 2004 and recent evaluations by Mathematica Policy Research, Inc. and a team from Oxford University). The texts include false biological information—e.g., that genital touching can result in pregnancy; ideology is presented as fact: e.g., a man needs “admiration” while a woman requires financial support. Children read a story about a princess whose prince left her for a village maiden because she didn’t hide her intellectual superiority. Still, 88% of students in these programs eventually have sex before marriage, roughly the same as their peers.

In early March, 2007, Wade Horn, point man at the Department of Health and Human Sciences for supervising welfare “reform,” announced that he was extending abstinence education to include adults from 18 to 29 years of age (Berkowitz 2005, 2007). The moral crusade launched through welfare reform is being expanded to the general population—a case of trickle-up morality. The Guttmacher Institute responded with disbelief; it had just published research showing that premarital sex has been the common experience of virtually all Americans for at least four decades (Finer 2007).

**A New Hand-Maid’s Tale**—

The target population for preconception health promotion is women, from menarche to menopause, who are capable of having children, even if they do not intend to conceive. (U.S. Center for Disease Control, 2006)

Whenever a “pre-conception,” woman consults her private medical practitioner, she may expect to be questioned about her private life. This document from the United States Center For Disease Control advises physicians to record the information so received in something called an “intervention”: Do you smoke, drink wine? Do you clean the cat’s litter box? A physician responded online with disgust, pointing out that wine, in moderation, had been proven beneficial; in any case, he continued, it was not up to him to delve into people’s private affairs, adding that he would not participate in something reminiscent of Nazi Germany. To many persons, this action of the government also brought grim images of Margaret Atwood’s Gilead, the subject of her dystopian novel, *The Handmaid’s Tale*.

Over the last six months, startled responses to the CDC report have been almost smothered in Googlesphere by paid advertisements for vitamin supplements for “pre-conception women,” vaccines that claim to protect diseases dangerous for “pre-conception women,” as well as government advisories on proper behavior for “pre-conception women.” If this perception of women becomes law, the equal rights amendment could never pass; Title IX and choice would be in jeopardy, seriously compromised by the legislated biological inequality of women.

If it were not so serious for the individuals involved, we could laugh at Mikado-like government fiats targeting intimate personal relationships. But it is not so funny for the little girl whose (single) mom tries to enroll her in Head Start—only to find that they are no longer considered a family; or the little boy whose parents (whether heterosexual or gay) have never married and therefore are not eligible for federal housing; or state governors who find themselves in the foolish predicament of having to compete against each other for federal funding by raising marriage statistics or lowering out-of-wedlock figures; or for the father who having established a good relationship with the (custodial) mother of his child is dragged into court for not fulfilling his obligation to the system.
PART III: SUMMARY

In sum, the three general subliminal truths examined in this article can be used to justify: warfare (Pacification, creative destruction, etc.); ethnocentrism (American Exceptionalism); and, finally, discrimination (Bloodlines, pure blood, etc.), the place, as noted above, where sexism meets racism. In different ways, these over-arching themes convey a necessity for purification, and perhaps that is at least partly the reason they often escape critical examination; purification, like humiliation, occupies a sensitive place in the human psyche.

Purification is the theme of the numerous flood legends found in virtually all parts of the ancient world; it is at least as old as the story told by Utnapishtim in the Babylonian epic, Gilgamesh, (third millennium BC), an antecedent of the Noah tale among others. It is also found in rebirth stories such as the phoenix bird myths of East Asia (sometimes used metaphorically by early Christians). Chastity (solely applied to women in most cases) has been considered a state of purity for at least as long as there have been patriarchal societies.

Mary Douglas has pointed out that the “final paradox” of the search for purification is that “it is an attempt to force experience into logical categories of non-contradiction, but the experience is not amenable and those who make the attempt find themselves led into contradiction” (Douglas 1966: 200). The three sub-truths examined in this paper—along with the STs they generate—indeed support Douglas’s point. All three lead to contradictions, at least as most people today would see it: Warfare does not pacify, clean, create or mend; neither the United States nor any group within it has been chosen as especially noble. And lastly, a high valuation on female virginity usually leads to the paradoxical mother-virgin figure.

The authoritarians who reject multiculturalism, international treaties, diverse family types, and the findings of scientists (re climate, evolution, and genetic determinism)—not to speak of “the complicated truth” are attempting to resurrect the top-down view of the world in which inferiors must not only be humiliated but be forced to internalize the conviction “that they are responsible for the damage that they have brought upon themselves.” After all, “Convincing subordinates that they are responsible for their humiliation and deserving of shame diverts attention away from the actions of the dominant group” (Hartling 2004: 107).

Deterministic theories—whether supported by blood, genetics, standardized testing, or awe-inspiring graphs—are obviously useful in supplanting the complicated truth with simplicity itself: single moms are “dumb,” (Herrnstein and Murray), the “bottom ten percent” are “stupid,” (Watson), and “those crappy little countries” that need to be thrown against walls from time to time should “feel shame” for their “inability to keep pace” (Ledeen). The “theater of war” has become a spectator sport with real persons’ lives sacrificed to the illusion of an American exceptionalism built on “limitless good.”

The U.S. cultural revolution of the 1960s, associated with a perceived loss of status in Vietnam, left some politicians and other members of elite groups grappling with the idea that they were victims of humiliation, feeling their privileged birthright slipping away from them.

From a human rights perspective, only certain claims for humiliation and demands for redress are deemed “legitimate,” but from both scholarly and pragmatic perspectives, it is unwise to label any such feelings as “right” or “wrong,”...because even if the injury is imaginary, the revenge is just as real (Lindler 2006:28).

To what extent their own desire for vengeance (as opposed to the lure of lucrative military investment) has driven U.S. leaders is similarly unimportant. However, the notion of revenge, combined with the national narrative many Americans imbied with their mothers’ milk, can be expected to ward off, or at least mute, substantial criticism. The main thrust of rightwing wrath has been levied at the sea-change in sexual mores, which, despite all the intimidating tactics of “trickle-up morality” (see above), has not been thwarted. Undoubtedly fueling this anger is a realization, despite the rhetoric, that a weakening allegiance to the authority of church and state—not moral laxity—is behind the continuing rise in out-of-wedlock
births, now reaching nearly four of every ten babies born in the U.S., a trend similar to the European one. U.S. teen pregnancies have hit an all-time low, indicating that decision by older partners, not the ignorance of children, is the main factor. Are there signs that the bring-back-stigma crowd is beginning to have an effect on the hesitant? I don’t know. However, a new kind of plastic surgery called hymenoplasty (hymen reconstruction) has come into being, while some churches offer a less expensive solution to the shamed: temporary virginity.

Sub-truths do not require fabrication to exist, but, in a society where propaganda has been raised to an art form, it is essential for citizens to acquire the intellectual tools to sift fact from fancy. USAF Colonel (Ret.) Sam Gardiner, who used to teach at the National War College, conducted an investigation into the propaganda mill run by Donald Rumsfeld. He reported: “There were over 50 stories manufactured or at least engineered that distorted the picture of Gulf II for the American and British people” (Gardiner 2003).

“At present we are sleepwalking into one-man rule,” wrote Jonathan Schell recently (Oct.8, 2007), Humiliation seems to be propelling U.S. troops to march into yet another illusion: “surgical strikes” to pacify Iran, while even the generals protest. A Democratic Congress refuses to cut funds for a reluctant Pentagon, adding to a national deficit only a billionaire could love.

Yes, walkers have been walking away from obedience to church and state, and perhaps some are hesitant to admit just what a giant step that is. Individual choice over institutional allegiance has always been an important part of the very definition of democracy; yet, in today’s political climate, it must be defended. Of course, it does mean not being ashamed to question some assumptions with very old pedigrees.

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**Footnotes**
[1] Dan M. Kahan, Professor at the Yale Law School, was probably the most influential promoter of public humiliation as an alternative to incarceration. Unexpectedly, ten years after his original publications on the subject, he recanted his position in favor of restorative justice (1996 and 2006).

[2] The Neo-conservative think-tank Project for a New American Century (PNAC) was officially founded in 1997, although parts of the planned agenda had already surfaced as a 40-page Defense Department memo leaked to The New York Times in 1992. PNAC was the fruition of some 35 years of effort in gathering financial and media support for an authoritarian ideology that included pre-emptive wars, nuclear weapons availability for limited wars, the development of biological weaponry, regime change, control of global energy resources, a global constabulary function, resurrection of the missile defense system, and a dramatic expansion of the military budget to maintain preparedness to fight “multiple simultaneous major theater wars” to quote from the 90-page document, Rebuilding America’s Defenses (2000). The same report includes the observation that “the process of transformation, even if it brings revolutionary change, is likely to be a long one, absent some catastrophic and catalyzing event -- like a new Pearl Harbor” (Donnelly 2000). The attack on the twin towers served this purpose, and jump-started the Neocon agenda which became official doctrine nine days later when President Bush presented the “National Security Strategy of the United States of America.” By 2003, according to the latest figures from the Department of Defense, U.S. troops were present in 70% of the sovereign independent nations of the world (135 of 195) (Basic Structures Report). The military buildup has led to the destruction of domestic programs and the amassing of unprecedented debt: from a surplus when the Bush administration took over in 2001 to an estimated $10 trillion deficit projected for 2009 according to the Congressional Budget Office (Carter 2005: 191f).


[4] One self-described conservative whose unhappiness with the present brand of Republicanism made him register as an Independent, is James Dean, a Washington insider since Watergate days. His book on authoritarianism was written out of concern that “…the authoritarians who have already taken control, will take American democracy where no freedom-loving person would want to go” (2005: 180, 184).


[6] Usually, this much-quoted passage is attributed to Richard Perle, but I have also seen it attributed to Michael Ledeen’s name a number of times-- even once attributed to Wolfowitz. It doesn’t really matter; the hubris displayed could come from any one of the three. But it is a good example of the way STs travel through printed sources--a circumstance once solely associated with oral transmission in a discredited definition of folklore. Meanwhile, I’ll stick with John Pilger’s book as being the authentic source.

[7] Strauss’s early writings reveal his affinity for extreme authoritarian political ideas. In a letter dated May, 1933, he proclaimed his contempt for egalitarian values and vowed that he wouldn’t let his own victimization (from anti-Semitism) drive him to the “ludicrous and despicible appeal of human rights” or shake him from what he called “principles of the right, that is from the fascist, authoritarian and imperial principles.” He referred to his own personal disbelief in religion and his admiration for the Roman Empire: “There is no reason to crawl to the cross, neither to the cross of liberalism so long as somewhere in the world there is a glimmer of the spark of the Roman thought” (Strauss 1933/ 2001; Horton 2006). Carl Schmitt, the Nazi legal scholar who rewrote the German constitution to justify Hitler’s coup in 1934, got Strauss the Rockefeller Foundation grant that sponsored research in France and England on his way to the United States (Horton 2006). Finally, as a scholar of ancient Greek and Roman philosophy, Strauss’s particular interest was in the hierarchical structure of the Platonic regime in which intellectually elite rulers kept the majority in line through coded messages and noble lies. There is little doubt that the match between Strauss’s viewpoint and that of U.S. politicians trying to counter the counter culture was serendipitous. At the time Strauss’s ideas began to filter into U.S. consciousness, right-wing forces were setting up right-wing think tanks, especially the Heritage Foundation founded in 1973 (the year of Straus’s death) by Paul Weyrich with the deep pockets of beer magnate Joseph Coors (to be followed by the equally deep pockets of Richard Scaife).

[8] memorialized in Saul Bellows's novel, Ravelstein. [9] CUNY is the nation’s largest urban public university. In 1995, before the welfare “reform” bill was signed, 28,000 students were enrolled in CUNY; there were programs to help impoverished students (those below 50% of the poverty line) receive public assistance to attain college degrees, and their success is reflected in the fact that 90% of those students left welfare permanently. Most recipients were African-American parents (mostly single moms) entitled to use AFDC (Aid to Families with Dependent Children). 18,000 students were forced to drop out of this one university when TANF (Temporary Aid to Needy Families) was substituted for AFDC under welfare “reform.”


About the Author

Pandora Hopkins taught at Yale University, Rutgers University and CUNY (the City University of New York) before moving to Mexico where she is writing a book, tentatively called *House of Cards and the Subliminal Truths That Are Holding It Together*, from which this article derives. She also co-directs (with Victoria Fontan) an oral history project, "Voting With Their Feet." A particular research focus on the political consequences of cross-cultural perception was also manifested by her book, *Aural Thinking in Norway* (Plenum, 1986); it is a study of the cognitive nature of aural transmission through an analysis of the Hardanger fiddle tradition of Norway.