

America: The Grim Truth

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American Myth and American REALITY

Americans, I have some bad news for you. You have the worst quality of life in the developed world – by a wide margin.

If you had any idea of how people really lived in Western Europe, Australia, New Zealand, Canada and many parts of Asia, you'd be rioting in the streets calling for a better life. In fact, the average Australian or Singaporean taxi driver has a much better standard of living than the typical American white-collar worker.

I know this because I am an American, and I escaped from the prison you call home.

I have lived all around the world, in wealthy countries and poor ones, and there is only one country I would never consider living in again: The United States of America. The mere thought of it fills me with dread.

Consider this: you are the only people in the developed world without a single-payer health system. Everyone in Western Europe, Japan, Canada, Australia, Singapore and New Zealand has a single-payer system. If they get sick, they can devote all their energies to getting well. If you get sick, you have to battle two things at once: your illness and the fear of financial ruin. Millions of Americans go bankrupt every year due to medical bills, and tens of thousands die each year because they have no insurance or insufficient insurance. And don't believe for a second that rot about America having the world's best medical care or the shortest waiting lists: I've been to hospitals in Australia, New Zealand, Europe, Singapore, and Thailand, and every one was better than the "good" hospital I used to go to back home. The waits were shorter, the facilities more comfortable, and the doctors just as good.

This is ironic, because you need a good health system more than anyone else in the world. Why? Because your lifestyle is almost designed to make you sick.

Let's start with your diet: Much of the beef you eat has been exposed to fecal matter in processing. Your chicken is contaminated with salmonella. Your stock animals and poultry are pumped full of growth hormones and antibiotics. In most other countries, the government would act to protect consumers from this sort of thing; in the United States, the government is bought off by industry to prevent any effective regulations or inspections. In a few years, the majority of all the produce for sale in the United States will be from genetically modified crops, thanks to the cozy relationship between Monsanto Corporation and the United States government. Worse still, due to the vast quantities of high-fructose corn syrup Americans consume, fully one-third of children born in the United States today will be diagnosed with Type 2 diabetes at some point in their lives.

Of course, it's not just the food that's killing you, it's the drugs. If you show any sign of life when you're young, they'll put you on Ritalin. Then, when you get old enough to take a good look around, you'll get depressed, so they'll give you Prozac. If you're a man, this will render you chemically impotent, so you'll need Viagra to get it up. Meanwhile, your steady diet of trans-fat-laden food is

guaranteed to give you high cholesterol, so you'll get a prescription for Lipitor. Finally, at the end of the day, you'll lay awake at night worrying about losing your health plan, so you'll need Lunesta to go to sleep.

With a diet guaranteed to make you sick and a health system designed to make sure you stay that way, what you really need is a long vacation somewhere. Unfortunately, you probably can't take one. I'll let you in on little secret: if you go to the beaches of Thailand, the mountains of Nepal, or the coral reefs of Australia, you'll probably be the only American in sight. And you'll be surrounded crowds of happy Germans, French, Italians, Israelis, Scandinavians and wealthy Asians. Why? Because they're paid well enough to afford to visit these places AND they can take vacations long enough to do so. Even if you could scrape together enough money to go to one of these incredible places, by the time you recovered from your jetlag, it would time to get on a plane and rush back to your job.

If you think I'm making this up, check the stats on average annual vacation days by country:

Finland: 44
Italy: 42
France: 39
Germany: 35
UK: 25
Japan: 18
USA: 12

The fact is, they work you like dogs in the United States. This should come as no surprise: the United States never got away from the plantation/sweat shop labor model and any real labor movement was brutally suppressed. Unless you happen to be a member of the ownership class, your options are pretty much limited to barely surviving on service-sector wages or playing musical chairs for a spot in a cubicle (a spot that will be outsourced to India next week anyway). The very best you can hope for is to get a professional degree and then milk the system for a slice of the middle-class pie. And even those who claw their way into the middle class are but one illness or job loss away from poverty. Your jobs aren't secure. Your company has no loyalty to you. They'll play you off against your coworkers for as long as it suits them, then they'll get rid of you.

Of course, you don't have any choice in the matter: the system is designed this way. In most countries in the developed world, higher education is either free or heavily subsidized; in the United States, a university degree can set you back over US\$100,000. Thus, you enter the working world with a crushing debt. Forget about taking a year off to travel the world and find yourself - you've got to start working or watch your credit rating plummet.

If you're "lucky," you might even land a job good enough to qualify you for a home loan. And then you'll spend half your working life just paying the interest on the loan - welcome to the world of American debt slavery. America has the illusion of great wealth because there's a lot of "stuff" around, but who really owns it? In real terms, the average American is poorer than the poorest ghetto dweller in Manila, because at least they have no debts. If they want to pack up and leave, they can; if you want to leave, you can't, because you've got debts to pay.

All this begs the question: Why would anyone put up with this? Ask any American and you'll get the same answer: because America is the freest country on earth. If you believe this, I've got some more bad news for you: America is actually among the least free countries on earth. Your piss is tested, your emails and phone calls are monitored, your medical records are gathered, and you are never

more than one stray comment away from writhing on the ground with two Taser prongs in your ass.

And that's just physical freedom. Mentally, you are truly imprisoned. You don't even know the degree to which you are tormented by fears of medical bankruptcy, job loss, homelessness and violent crime because you've never lived in a country where there is no need to worry about such things.

But it goes much deeper than mere surveillance and anxiety. The fact is, you are not free because your country has been taken over and occupied by another government. Fully 70% of your tax dollars go to the Pentagon, and the Pentagon is the real government of the United States. You are required under pain of death to pay taxes to this occupying government. If you're from the less fortunate classes, you are also required to serve and die in their endless wars, or send your sons and daughters to do so. You have no choice in the matter: there is a socio-economic draft system in the United States that provides a steady stream of cannon fodder for the military.

If you call a life of surveillance, anxiety and ceaseless toil in the service of a government you didn't elect "freedom," then you and I have a very different idea of what that word means.

If there was some chance that the country could be changed, there might be reason for hope. But can you honestly look around and conclude that anything is going to change? Where would the change come from? The people? Take a good look at your compatriots: the working class in the United States has been brutally propagandized by jackals like Rush Limbaugh, Bill O'Reilly and Sean Hannity. Members of the working class have been taught to lick the boots of their masters and then bend over for another kick in the ass. They've got these people so well trained that they'll take up arms against the other half of the working class as soon as their masters give the word.

If the people cannot make a change, how about the media? Not a chance. From Fox News to the New York Times, the mass media in the United States is nothing but the public relations wing of the corporatocracy, primarily the military industrial complex. At least the citizens of the former Soviet Union knew that their news was bullshit. In America, you grow up thinking you've got a free media, which makes the propaganda doubly effective. If you don't think American media is mere corporate propaganda, ask yourself the following question: have you ever heard a major American news outlet suggest that the country could fund a single-payer health system by cutting military spending?

If change can't come from the people or the media, the only other potential source of change would be the politicians. Unfortunately, the American political process is among the most corrupt in the world. In every country on earth, one expects politicians to take bribes from the rich. But this generally happens in secret, behind the closed doors of their elite clubs. In the United States, this sort of political corruption is done in broad daylight, as part of legal, accepted, standard operating procedure. In the United States, they merely call these bribes campaign donations, political action committees and lobbyists. One can no more expect the politicians to change this system than one can expect a man to take an axe and chop his own legs out from underneath him.

No, the United States of America is not going to change for the better. The only change will be for the worse. And when I say worse, I mean much worse. As we speak, the economic system that sustained the country during the post-war years is collapsing. The United States maxed out its "credit card" sometime in 2008 and now its lenders, starting with China, are in the process of laying the foundations for a new monetary system to replace the Anglo-American "petro-dollar" system. As soon as there is a viable alternative to the US dollar, the greenback will sink like a stone.

While the United States was running up crushing levels of debt, it was also busy shipping its

manufacturing jobs and white-collar jobs overseas, and letting its infrastructure fall to pieces. Meanwhile, Asian and European countries were investing in education, infrastructure and raw materials. Even if the United States tried to rebuild a real economy (as opposed to a service/financial economy) do think American workers would ever be able to compete with the workers of China or Europe? Have you ever seen a Japanese or German factory? Have you ever met a Singaporean or Chinese worker?

There are only two possible futures facing the United States, and neither one is pretty. The best case is a slow but orderly decline – essentially a continuation of what’s been happening for the last two decades. Wages will drop, unemployment will rise, Medicare and Social Security benefits will be slashed, the currency will decline in value, and the disparity of wealth will spiral out of control until the United States starts to resemble Mexico or the Philippines – tiny islands of wealth surrounded by great poverty (the country is already halfway there).

Equally likely is a sudden collapse, perhaps brought about by a rapid flight from the US dollar by creditor nations like China, Japan, Korea and the OPEC nations. A related possibility would be a default by the United States government on its vast debt. One look at the financial balance sheet of the US government should convince you how likely this is: governmental spending is skyrocketing and tax receipts are plummeting – something has to give. If either of these scenarios plays out, the resulting depression will make the present recession look like a walk in the park.

Whether the collapse is gradual or gut-wrenchingly sudden, the results will be chaos, civil strife and fascism. Let’s face it: the United States is like the former Yugoslavia – a collection of mutually antagonistic cultures united in name only. You’ve got your own version of the Taliban: right-wing Christian fundamentalists who actively loathe the idea of secular Constitutional government. You’ve got a vast intellectual underclass that has spent the last few decades soaking up Fox News and talk radio propaganda, eager to blame the collapse on Democrats, gays and immigrants. You’ve got a ruthless ownership class that will use all the means at its disposal to protect its wealth from the starving masses.

On top of all that you’ve got vast factory farms, sprawling suburbs and a truck-based shipping system, all of it entirely dependent on oil that is about to become completely unaffordable. And you’ve got guns. Lots of guns. In short: the United States is about to become a very unwholesome place to be.

Right now, the government is building fences and walls along its northern and southern borders. Right now, the government is working on a national ID system (soon to be fitted with biometric features). Right now, the government is building a surveillance state so extensive that they will be able to follow your every move, online, in the street and across borders. If you think this is just to protect you from “terrorists,” then you’re sadly mistaken. Once the shit really hits the fan, do you really think you’ll just be able to jump into the old station wagon, drive across the Canadian border and spend the rest of your days fishing and drinking Molson? No, the government is going to lock the place down. They don’t want their tax base escaping. They don’t want their “recruits” escaping. They don’t want YOU escaping.

I am not writing this to scare you. I write this to you as a friend. If you are able to read and understand what I’ve written here, then you are a member of a small minority in the United States. You are a minority in a country that has no place for you.

So what should you do?

You should leave the United States of America.

If you're young, you've got plenty of choices: you can teach English in the Middle East, Asia or Europe. Or you can go to university or graduate school abroad and start building skills that will qualify you for a work visa. If you've already got some real work skills, you can apply to emigrate to any number of countries as a skilled immigrant. If you are older and you've got some savings, you can retire to a place like Costa Rica or the Philippines. If you can't qualify for a work, student or retirement visa, don't let that stop you - travel on a tourist visa to a country that appeals to you and talk to the expats you meet there. Whatever you do, go speak to an immigration lawyer as soon as you can. Find out exactly how to get on a path that will lead to permanent residence and eventually citizenship in the country of your choice.

You will not be alone. There are millions of Americans just like me living outside the United States. Living lives much more fulfilling, peaceful, free and abundant than we ever could have attained back home. Some of us happened upon these lives by accident - we tried a year abroad and found that we liked it - others made a conscious decision to pack up and leave for good. You'll find us in Canada, all over Europe, in many parts of Asia, in Australia and New Zealand, and in most other countries of the globe. Do we miss our friends and family? Yes. Do we occasionally miss aspects of our former country? Yes. Do we plan on ever living again in the United States? Never. And those of us with permanent residence or citizenship can sponsor family members from back home for long-term visas in our adopted countries.

In closing, I want to remind you of something: unless you are an American Indian or a descendant of slaves, at some point your ancestors chose to leave their homeland in search of a better life. They weren't traitors and they weren't bad people, they just wanted a better life for themselves and their families. Isn't it time that you continue their journey?

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