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201022 OBITER DICTA: MID-AUGUST 2010

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201022 OBITER DICTA: MID-AUGUST 2010
Steven Alan Samson

Thursday, August 12

<http://www.washingtonexaminer.com/opinion/blogs/beltway-confidential/what-70-years-of-economic-central-planning-hath-wrought-for-housing-100572859.html>

In "What 70 Years of Economic Central Planning Hath Wrought for Housing," David Freddoso comments on a *USA Today* analysis of the state of the housing market.

"Freddie and Fannie, with their government backing, allowed the proliferation of 30-year, fixed-rate mortgages – a product that lenders would otherwise shun. Reason: Long-term, fixed-rate loans struggle in any interest rate scenario. If rates rise, banks are squeezed, because their revenue remains fixed even though they have to pay more for deposits and other funding. If rates fall, homeowners refinance. 'No rational market participant is going to bear that risk.'" The interest rates on such mortgages have hit a new low at 4.4%.

Friday 13

http://townhall.com/columnists/MattTowery/2010/08/13/america_free_falling/page/full

In "America Free Falling," Matt Towery contends that we are in an economic depression. The tripwire for the Great Depression was the nearly 60% tariff that was imposed under the Smoot-Hawley Act in 1930. Decades of irresponsible borrowing and lending by an increasingly bloated federal government are catching up with us this time around. But once again the consequences are the same. The economy is shutting down because of fear.

"The Federal Reserve has come out with the news that more than \$1.8 trillion in capital is sitting idle because businesses are too uncertain about the economic and government-regulatory future to risk putting their money on the line by investing it."

A plummeting stock market and growing public dismay with the ruling party are indicative of a loss of confidence as recovery seems to recede further from reach. Unfortunately, gridlock, rather than budgetary retrenchment, is a more likely electoral outcome after November, even if, and perhaps especially, if Republicans take control of both houses of Congress. The road to financial health requires a carefully planned and systematic reversal of much recent legislation and a carefully planned and systematic dismantling of much of the Administrative State.

Three decades ago, Ronald Reagan promised to dismantle two cabinet-level departments, Education and Energy. Today, nearly three decades after the publication of *A Nation at Risk*, American education is in a tail spin. Recent additions to the critical literature include Diane Ravitch's *The Death and Life of the Great American School System*, Robert Weissberg's *Bad Students, Not Bad Schools*, and Craig Brandon's *The Five Year Party*. In "America's Ruling Class,"

Angelo Codevilla describes as clearly as anyone the entitlement mentality that today riddles the political establishment and that, Midas-like, turns the social and cultural fabric into something resembling Swiss cheese. We are becoming the first ADHD nation.

Unless we can restore the kind of federalism and strong local governance with which the United States began, the insolvency of the federal government and many of the states will drag down the entire country. Like Slovakia, which does not want to prop up larger and richer states like Greece, much of our own country deeply resents the profligacy of those who continue to control the purse strings. Yet without statesman-like leadership, we are likely to see the free fall resume and to continue.

<http://www.firstthings.com/blogs/spengler/2010/08/12/the-great-muslim-disconnect/>

David P. Goldman takes note of the president's Ramadan message in "The Great Muslim Disconnect." The problem is a fundamental cultural divide that too many would ignore at our peril.

"Americans don't know why they don't like Islam, but they can detect a radical difference in outlook between a religion that emphasizes collective identity and obedience, and their own civic religion founded on the Jewish and Christian belief in the sanctity of the individual. For all the relativizing tilt of the news media, they have seen enough of Muslim anger at America to realize that most Muslims don't really like us. The Stan Greenberg polling organizations show 57% of Americans pro-Israel and only 7% pro-Palestinian."

In *National Review* for August 16, Claire Berlinski, who resides in Istanbul, makes the case why the West should "Ban the Burqa." Her reason is simple: "The path from veiling to the practice of killing unveiled women is not so meandering as you might think." <http://www.nationalreview.com/articles/243587/ban-burqa-claire-berlinski>

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/08/12/AR2010081204918.html>

Rep. Paul Ryan explains his road map to save Medicare.

<http://pajamasmedia.com/blog/at-doj-military-voting-rights-hang-in-the-balance/?singlepage=true>

A Department of Justice whistleblower notes how twelve states are trying to evade a law that would require that absentee ballots be sent to military personnel much earlier than the 30-day turnaround that had prevailed prior to last year and which resulted in 18,000 military ballots not being counted in 2008.

Saturday 14

<http://www.debka.com/article/8969/>

DEBKAFfile contends that Israel suffered a setback in Azerbaijan when Iran-sponsored terrorists were released to Iran through a prisoner swap.

<http://www.thenewatlantis.com/publications/the-unique-worth-of-an-individual-human-life>

In "The Unique Worth of an Individual Human Life," Leon Kass pays tribute the life of his mentor, Paul Ramsey, and his pioneering work in the field of bioethics. I first encountered Ramsey's work while pursuing my wide-ranging research on the impact of science and technology on modern society in the early 1970s.

"The men of science who then wrote on bioethics were largely mush-headed, soft-hearted utopians, trusting in an invisible hand of progress more providential than God Almighty. And here was Ramsey, a professed man of faith, who could reason better than them all, and, moreover, was not afraid of being found unpopular."

http://www.city-journal.org/2010/20_3_european-conscience.html

Much as Pierre Manent did in his essay "Current Problems in European Democracy," Pascal Bruckner reflects on "Europe's Guilty Conscience." Daniel Pipes drew on Bruckner in April for his article "In Europe, Remorse Has Turned to Masochism," which would be a good title for this piece, as well. What Codevilla explained at length about "America's Ruling Class," Bruckner reveals about European self-loathing in short. He concludes:

"Penitence is finally a political choice; it is to choose an abdication that in no way immunizes us against mistakes. Fear of repeating yesterday's errors makes us too indulgent of contemporary outrages. By preferring injustice to disorder, the Old World risks being swept away by chaos, the victim of a renunciation mistaken for wisdom." Like European leaders, our ruling class similarly wishes to renounce the American past and render our country "post-historical."

"We long thought that Europe was the future of Switzerland. But what if the opposite were true? What if Switzerland is the future of Europe--what if we are threatened by Helvetization? In that case, our continent, aging and in decline, would be reduced to a high-class sanatorium--ready to be dismembered piece by piece by all predators and to renounce its freedom to gain just a little more quiet and comfort." This is why we must listen to Claire Berlinski when she proposes to ban the burqa. We must embrace the liberty for which our forebears fought and reject the blissful forgetfulness and servility of the Lotos-Eaters.

<http://www.washingtonexaminer.com/opinion/columns/OpEd-Contributor/Dore-Gold-Israel-and-the-issue-of-the-1967-borders-100680384.html>

Israel's former UN ambassador, Dore Gold, discusses the armistice line of 1949 and why it was never regarded as a permanent boundary or even a prospective one.

Sunday 15

http://www.americanthinker.com/2010/08/american_muslims_debate_loyalt.html

In "American Muslims Debate Loyalty to America," Eileen Toplansky cites an editorial by Paul Sperry on the proliferation of American-born jihadists and a study by MEMRI of rulings by American Muslim jurists. As Toplansky concludes:

"The jihadists are intent upon the destruction of this country. If moderate Muslims do exist, then it behooves them to fight the American traitors among us. If American Muslims continue to reflect a conflicted relationship with their country of birth, putting Islam above all else, then other Americans will rightly conclude that a civil war is upon us - one that al-Qaeda is steadfastly perpetrating."

Monday 16

<http://pajamasmedia.com/blog/is-turkey-using-chemical-weapons-against-the-kurds/?singlepage=true>

Soeren Kern discusses evidence of chemical attacks against Kurds by Turkey.

Tuesday 17

http://www.americanthinker.com/2010/08/the_main_thing.html

Vasko Kohlmayer summarizes the bad news about our fiscal crisis. He has no good news to offer.

<http://hamptonroads.com/node/565575>

According to a federal judge, the act of firing upon a US Navy vessel does not of itself constitute an act of piracy.

<http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052748704111704575355311122648100.html>

I sympathize with the writer of "The Perils of 'wannabe Cool' Christianity." Phoniness of any sort in the church contributes to the high dropout rate. But some of these "hipster" examples cross the line from venial to deadly sins. This is the sort of worldliness that entices, entraps, and puts people into bondage. I have used David Kupelian's *The Marketing of Evil* in class. This term I will have students read the opening chapter of *How Evil Works*. As in all else: *Caveat emptor*. Vance Packard's *The Hidden Persuaders* and *The Status Seekers* are as relevant as ever.

<http://www.debka.com/article/8973/>

It appears that the Bushehr reactor has been suffering from a rash of UFO attacks.

Wednesday 18

http://townhall.com/columnists/TerryJeffrey/2010/08/18/fix_the_constitutional_falshoods_congress_carved_into_the_capitols_marble/page/full

The U.S. Capitol Visitors Center embraces the notion of a Living Constitution that makes it a vanguard of Progressivism: a Constitution of Powers as opposed to a Constitution of Limitations. Terry Jeffrey cites Thomas Jefferson to the contrary: "To take a single step beyond the boundaries thus specially drawn around the powers of Congress, is to take possession of a boundless field of power, no long susceptible of any definition."

The elliptical emendations of the Constitution's text carved into the marble walls are reminiscent of the living, pig-inspired constitution that governed George Orwell's *Animal Farm*.

Thursday 19

http://www.americanthinker.com/2010/08/the_gops_lost_brand.html

Randall Hoven wants to bring back the Republican brand, which still meant something as recently as ten years ago. Let the spendthrifts run as Democrats.

http://www.nytimes.com/2008/05/12/opinion/12luttwak.html?_r=2&pagewanted=print

According to Edward Luttwak, writing two years ago during the presidential race, Obama's status as a Muslim apostate was the issue of greatest significance to the Muslim world. Public uncertainty about the president's religious profession is beside the point because it assumes that religious identity is subjective in nature. Not so with Islam. It is more like a status than a contract.

Friday 20

http://townhall.com/columnists/DianaWest/2010/08/20/mosque_initiative_giving_me_b_ad_dreams/page/full

Diana West, the author of *Death of the Grown-up*, is troubled by the prospect a spreading of Shariah culture in our own country as more Islamic expectations are adopted into our political and cultural institutions.

"What would expanding Shariah mean here? More halal-butchered livestock leading, as in Europe, to halal-only menus? More midnight football practice during Ramadan? More sex-segregated swimming pools? More incitement to jihad in 'radical' mosques? More 'apostates' living in fear? More self-censorship, I mean 'respect,' when it comes to discussing Islam?"

"An excellent benchmark of Shariah's remarkable and, think of it, post-9/11 progress is that none of the above manifestations of Islamic law - all designed to sync society with Islamic practice - are shocking to us. Indeed, marital rape, permissible in Shariah culture wherever it spreads, got a "religious" pass from a New Jersey judge last month (overturned by an appellate court). Death by stoning, however, still seems to take everybody's breath away as those who read about last weekend's Taliban stoning in Afghanistan, I hope, would agree."

<http://www.debka.com/article/8983/>

It is tomorrow in Israel and Iran – the day the fuel rods are supposed to be inserted into the Bushehr reactor. It is the deadline that John Bolton gave for military action. Anthony Cave Brown wrote about a *Bodyguard of Lies* during the Second World War that ended up deceiving even the deceivers. Who knows the score today?

<http://www.bigquestionsonline.com/columns/phillip-longman/demography-and-economic-destiny>

Phillip Longman describes the approaching demographic winter and its economic consequences.

"Over the next 40 years, according to the UN, world population will grow from 6.9 billion to 9.1 billion, which may sound like more of the same robust growth that we saw throughout the 20th century. But this will be a very different kind of population growth from anything humankind has seen before. The rate of growth is perpetually diminishing toward zero, and more than half of the remaining increase in population (56 percent) will be among people over 60 – among people, that is, who have already been born."

"This may seem impossible, but when calculating population growth, declining death rates are just as important as rising birthrates."

We had better hold on tight because we are riding the whip's lash.

Saturday 21

<http://pajamasmedia.com/blog/barry-goldwater-and-the-ground-zero-mosque/?singlepage=true>

Abraham H. Miller gives an excellent summary of the general attitude of America's ruling class – what Roger Scruton calls "the culture of repudiation" – as it is revealed in the "Ground Zero mosque" controversy. It is not so much the controversy itself that should give us pause as should the underlying assumptions of our post-American *rois fainéants*.

"The extreme left of the Democratic base hates America as it hates itself. It demeans those who fight and die to defend our freedoms and it exalts those who would destroy us. In academia, anti-American radicals like Bill Ayers and Bernadine Dohrn find easy access to employment, while Vietnam veterans had to hide their service from the scrutiny of the faculty hiring committees. How else does one explain the unholy and unfathomable alliance between the self-proclaimed progressives and Islam, one of the most reactionary forces on the planet? Hatred, as Eric Hoffer noted, is indeed the great unifier of social movements."

Perhaps what we have here is a bit of burqa-envy.

<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/worldnews/article-1304465/The-men-golden-guns-Mexican-museum-displays-vulgar-array-weaponry-confiscated-drug-lords.html>

Here are some pictures of gold-plated weapons and other captured narco-kitsch, including a piece belonging to Comandante Tiburon of the Gulf cartel.

http://www.iwp.edu/news_publications/detail/prof-poteat-comments-on-polish-plane-crash-in-tygodnik-solidarnosc

I missed this piece from a couple of months ago. Eugene Poteat comments on the Polish crash "investigation."

<http://www.brusselsjournal.com/node/4507>

Here is Diana West's column on the Russian "investigation" into the Polish air crash.

Sunday 22

<http://pajamasmedia.com/blog/returning-from-israel-believing-that-peace-is-possible/?singlepage=true>

Ryan Mauro returns from Israel expressing his optimism for peace, noting that Hamas has greater support in the West Bank than in Gaza where it rules, and even less support among Israeli Arabs.

"The biggest obstacle to peace isn't the settlements or any other land dispute. It is the lack of integration with the world that allows extremist forces to poison minds. As the lines of support from the state sponsors of terrorism are severed, you will see things rapidly change as the truth comes to light. The ideology of radical Islam cannot survive without outside subsidies."

"There may be no peace process in the traditional sense of the term, as you cannot accommodate those seeking your destruction, but a process towards peace outside of the official negotiating table is underway. The Israelis I hung out with during my stay, the ones who should be most pessimistic about the prospect for peace, are the most optimistic."

Tuesday 24

<http://blogs.the-american-interest.com/wrm/2010/08/22/rajendra-pachauri-vooodoo-scientist-and-lone-ranger-of-love/>

Walter Russell Mead gives an entertaining review of a *Bildungsroman* by Al Gore's co-Laureate, Rajendra Pachari, the recent head of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change who revealed last year that Himalayan glaciers will melt within thirty-five years.

The hero of this Indian bestseller, Sanjay, is a "narcissistic ninny and fop" for whom "[no] new age cliché can be too silly. . . . At one point, a mysterious holy man with a great deal of funding has graduate students wear special tin hats through which they are put in contact with the 'divine'. This is all very scientific, the narrator reassures us; the subjects report on a scale of one to ten how close to the deity they feel and the resulting date is averaged and calculated using the best available statistical methods. The data allows the holy man to determine that, just as the ancient Hindu sages taught, the earth has

specially holy places where the electro-magnetic waves emanating from the divine are felt more strongly than at others."

"In a brief walk on role in the novel, Shirley Maclaine explains about the mountains of Peru and immediately recognizes Sanjay as a kindred spirit and a fellow Great Soul." As one reader's comment puts it, "Pauchari sounds like an excellent case study for Thomas Sowell's Vision of the Anointed." Indeed. It is a good illustration of the Gnosticism that passes for intelligence in our times.

http://www.realclearpolitics.com/articles/2010/08/24/medical_care_facts_and_fables_106865.html

In a review of *The Truth About ObamaCare* by Sally Pipes, Thomas Sowell summarizes some inconvenient truths about American health care.

"She cites a study by Professors Ohsfeldt and Schneider at the University of Iowa, which shows that, if you leave out people who are victims of homicide or who die in automobile accidents, Americans live longer than people in any other Western country."

"Doctors do not prevent homicides or car crashes. In the things that doctors can affect, such as the survival rates of cancer patients, the United States leads the world."

"Americans get the latest pharmaceutical drugs, sometimes years before those drugs are available to people in Britain or in other countries where the government runs the medical system. Why? Because the latest drugs cost more and it is cheaper to let people die."

"The media have often said that we have higher infant mortality rates than other countries with government medical care systems. But we count every baby that dies and other countries do not. If the media don't tell you that, so much the better for ObamaCare."

<http://io9.com/5616498/ultraviolet-light-reveals-how-ancient-greek-statues-really-looked>

Ultraviolet light and spectroscopy are helping art historians reconstruct the original colors of Greek sculptures.

Wednesday 25

http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Middle_East/LH26Ak03.html

Mir Hossein Mousavi is threatening to reveal some of the Iranian regime's secrets from when he was prime minister in the late 1980s. The ousted first president, Abolhassan Banisadr, who has seen Mousavi's 1989 resignation letter, believes Mousavi's life is in danger.

<http://www.investors.com/NewsAndAnalysis/Article.aspx?id=459224>

Jim Wallis: the post-American pastor to the post-American president.

<http://pajamasmedia.com/ronradosh/2010/08/23/rauf-and-the-state-department/?print=1>

Ron Radosh places Imam Rauf and his Cordoba Initiative under close scrutiny. Near the outset, he cites a piece Rauf wrote last summer for the *Huffington Post*, which is also quoted by Christopher Hitchens in a recent article. Rauf recommends that President Obama "should say his administration respects many of the guiding principles of the 1979 revolution - to establish a government that expresses the will of the people; a just government, based on the idea of Vilayet-i-faqih, that establishes the rule of law."

Hitchens offers a guide for the perplexed: "Vilayet-i-faqih is the special term promulgated by Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini to describe the idea that all of Iranian society is under the permanent stewardship (sometimes rendered as guardianship) of the mullahs. Under this dispensation, 'the will of the people' is a meaningless expression, because 'the people' are the wards and children of the clergy. It is the justification for a clerical supreme leader, whose rule is impervious to elections and who can pick and choose the candidates and, if it comes to that, the results. It is extremely controversial within Shiite Islam. (Grand Ayatollah Sistani in Iraq, for example, does not endorse it.) As for those numerous Iranians who are not Shiites, it reminds them yet again that they are not considered to be real citizens of the Islamic Republic."

This doctrine is nothing more or less than an Islamic version of Rousseau's general will, as contrasted with what Rousseau called "the will of all" - what is here termed "the will of the people." Khomeini's vilayet-i-faqih is yet another incarnation of the paternalism that is so dear to every Leftist heart. Rousseau's general will is an intellectual ancestor to the notion of "the best interests of the child" first promulgated in the mid-1970s. The beauty of all such ideas is that they require the services of a professional priesthood. The general will, of course, is to be understood whatever is in "the best interests of the people" - if only the people knew what is best for them. But never fear; help is on the way. "We are from the government; we are here to help." The whole idea is well-summarized in the opening of P. J. O'Rourke's review of Hillary Clinton's *It Takes a Village*: "It takes a village to raise a child. Washington is the village. You are the child."

<http://www.prospectmagazine.co.uk/1996/04/ittakesavillageidiot/>

Thursday 26

<http://pajamasmedia.com/richardfernandez/2010/08/25/fair-to-see-yet-doomed-to-die/>

Who knew? It appears that Popeye's friend Wimpy ("I'll gladly pay you Tuesday for a hamburger today") planted his flag in the DC Tidal Basin back in the 30s and has ever since been cutting new channels to and through the Treasury!

Richard Fernandez, who compares our plight with that of Adm. Graf von Spee, gets it exactly right: "The effect of a recession or depression on the deficit would be to reduce the taxation power of government, once again making it necessary for them to borrow to meet their promised entitlements and service the debt. This

further distorts the balance sheet. Eventually if something can't go on then it won't. Morgan Stanley goes on to say that because structural debt (the degree to which governments outspend their tax base) and the effects of demographics on entitlements are so high that sovereign debt can no longer be regarded as completely safe. One day, maybe soon, the music will stop playing and then what? The crisis is global but it is particularly acute in countries like Greece and threatens to bankrupt the USA."

"Although there are still some who believe that President Obama's Keynesian cures will work, the counter-thesis may be that the supposed 'cures' are in fact the cause of the disease. That the attempts to create European-style 'rights' enforced by Euro-scaled bureaucracies on a Federal tax revenue base has created a bureaucratic monster in Washington sustained principally by borrowed money."

". . . As the economy begins to wilt under the weight of debt there will be a temptation by government to borrow even more to keep the moribund patient twitching under the artificial stimulus of money injected directly into the veins of particular economic enterprises. Whether it is possible to outrun your own shadow remains to be seen. Logic says that you cannot.

Freeman Tilden once wrote that "public debt is a device intended to beguile the taxpayer into thinking he is getting something for nothing." Four decades ago, Rousas John Rushdoony foresaw the outcome of this fiscal boondoggle as he reflected on "The Moral Foundations of Money" and anticipated its its rough-hewn dénouement as a prospective rebirth of liberty.

"Every socialist state is a parasite. After destroying its own wealth, it must feed on another nation's wealth, and thus socialism is by nature driven to imperialism. It offers paradise on earth to other countries by means of socialism and seizes them to enable itself to survive. When the host body dies, the parasite dies"

So far, this seems to be an apt description of the Soviet empire from 1945 to 1970 when these words were written. Within twenty years, Mikhail Gorbachev's regime cut loose the East European satellites. Twenty years later they are still suffering from the vampiric legacy of state socialism. But Rushdoony had even bigger game in his crosshairs.

"Today, the United States is the host body for the parasitic socialism of the world, and the United States, because of its interventionism, is rapidly becoming a fearful parasite, drawing the wealth of the American people. When, however achieved, the host body is captured and destroyed, it will destroy the parasite also. The result will be a world-wide economic collapse of unrivalled dimensions and hardships. Out of this wreckage, a free order will emerge."

As Winston Churchill noted of Adm. Graf von Spee, Rushdoony likewise concluded: "The certainty of the present order is its death. The wise will prepare for liberty."