

Affluentza: The Main Mass American Malady



By Sidney Secular

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Spending more and enjoying it less? Bored? Not enough high-tech and mass produced dreck and toys to toy with? Need a new Honda, Hummer or EV bumper with which to make do until the next entertainment center is wheeled out for sale? What draws you to the mall where you can get mauled by “youth” anytime or trampled upon during aptly named Black Friday or driven to drink by the fractious crowds? And what about lesser holidays when lesser “sellebrations” attract the bargain hunters and it’s no bargain to get caught up in the traffic going to or from the “big box” stores, an act that can “box you in” for lengthy periods? Do you find yourself working non-stop or at two jobs to pay for all that “stuff” you and your family supposedly want, stuff that often gets stuffed away in remote corners until you decide it’s time for another yard sale?

If the above describes yourself and your family, without realizing it you may be suffering from an insufferable, highly contagious American malady – affluentza! This particular virus has gone viral and infected nearly the entire world or at least those who are not in the process of dying of starvation or war. This condition is characterized by an obsession with material goods and materialism in general. Some of the distinctly American goods and services that are part and parcel of the mass purchase itinerary include eatables such as beer, soft drinks – ranging from cola to almost endless

varieties of the fizzy stuff frequently purchased in oversized bottles and multiple packs – sugared and salted snacks, as well as cosmetics, high-tech gadgetry, gambling modalities, collectable art as well as churned out mass “knock-off art,” video games, pornography and “adult” entertainment offerings, ethnic “queerzines”, rap crap and its pulsating, pounding variants, day trading, drug parties, and now the new “industry” of growing and getting high on pot. And as far as these “fads” go, both the rich and poor are in the same pot and are therefore similarly affected. The 21 st Century motto has become, “enough is never quite enough.”

These insatiable sensory and psychological needs often result in behavioral patterns that are aggressive, compulsive, competitive, and antagonistic – frequently all at the same time. Once you have “gained it” – whatever “it” is! – you can become overly fearful of “losing it” in both physical and emotional terms. You become sensitive to the point at which the thought of “losing it” whether to the government or to others who are similarly situated and motivated – that is, to the growing and sometimes desperate army of fraudsters – can consume you. And, as one ages, all face the reality of eventual and eternal loss through death itself. But even before that inevitability, you become fearful of winding up in a nursing home where your assets so carefully, painstakingly and resourcefully accumulated are lost or frittered away, often as a result of careless living and/or poor health habits.

All of this stress can – and often does! – result in losing your ability to remain fully human. In today’s America, our imagined happiness often depends upon our level of power, our ability to manipulate our surroundings, our feelings of general superiority and, of course, the quantity and quality of our material possessions. “Self-centered egotists” whether they are capitalists, individualists, libertarians but especially “well intentioned” socialists and communists

believe that they are “numero-uno” in most aspects of their lives, but such wrong-headed attitudes come with a distinct human cost including the presence of an individual’s spiritual vacuum. There is an old saying: “those who are wrapped up in themselves make very small packages!” The perception of an uncertain, meaningless, and purposeless world that results from these individual spiritual vacuums leads us to seek out security and certainty by any means necessary or available. The ultimate result of our spiritual starvation as it responds to mindless feelings of found but faux pleasure can be defined in the claim of “I’ve got mine, Jack”.

However, once these useless goals are “achieved” and we actually obtain so many “goodies” and enjoy so many “gotchas,” the disturbing question then arises, why is the US the world leader in anxiety, anger, unhappiness, cynicism and feelings of stress and despair? This fact is reflected in our high rates of divorce, suicide, depression, abortion, substance abuse and incarceration. Although real per capita personal consumption expenditures have nearly tripled in the past 50 years, the percentage of people claiming to be very happy has declined by 50% during that same time period. The Index of Social Health, an annual comprehensive report produced by Vassar College which measures 16 indicators of social health, shows a 50% reduction in overall social health over the past 25 years in the US.

Although we live in a period of supposed unprecedented prosperity, it is also the time of the reign of the “living dead”. It is the era of deadbeat dads, deadened feelings, anomie, school and work dropouts, drug deliriums and a period devoid of spiritual, intellectual and emotional life. Even our cultural and religious institutions appear, in the main, to be at best comatose and at worst, in rebellion against all that we once considered as good and needful for our civilization. It is no wonder that one of the largest “fictional” characters found in American entertainment is the zombie, a former human

being reduced to a deceased mindless automaton ingesting the brains of the living in order to survive! Indeed, some of these living dead can be found surfing the Internet, staying on top of email messages 24/7, frequenting Internet chat rooms, engaging in day trading, being glued to Fox news or CNN hoping to get excited over being the first to get the next big story funneled through the boob tube! The demand to stay on top of constantly developing and evolving narratives continues ad-nauseum, while driving to Wal-Mart or Costco to obtain the latest consumer crud crazes and sales specials, stocking up with a mini warehouse worth of assorted stuff, after which stopping off at McDonald's for a brief feeding frenzy involving faux food. And, of course, these same people must continue to feign interest in a forgettable job, watch the soaps or reruns on TV and waste time watching the GovMint, the politicians and corporate commercials pull our puppet strings with emotional mush and images of couples enjoying the diversity of racially mixed-up relationships. If we feel down over facial wrinkles showing up, we can get a facelift, revive a flaccid libido or body organ with big pharma's latest pills and solutions while enjoying the thousands of videos on YouTube! Of course, it is wise to watch certain videos before the censors remove the ones we want most to see!

Then, of course, we can go to a highly recommended ethnic restaurant to virtue signal and compare notes with our neighbors. The less meaning we have in our lives, the easier it is to accept the All-American idea of working hard – and in many cases hardly working! – playing hard, and shopping until you drop. We have an underrated and understated patriotic duty to consume so that the GNP can keep pace with past performance and economic growth will not stall. In addition, we now have the added responsibility of spending enough so that the global economy does not falter either, since we are told that the US is the global leader, whether or not that concept is warranted. Former Federal Reserve Chairman Alan Greenspan's worst nightmare has been that Americans may stop spending

enough to keep the economy artificially going.

Affluentza is a term that describes meaninglessness. Of course, once our way of life becomes itself meaningless, that only breeds more affluentza – and so the downward spiral increases, thus inspiring more spending – until we are totally spent. We're not quite sure what that will look like when it happens – as it surely will! – but we must know that it won't be pretty!

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