

How Far We've Fallen...



Steven Yates

The other day I found myself perusing Federalist Papers 51 and 10. James Madison penned both. An entire course in political philosophy could be built around the core passage in Federalist 51. The problem: something every civilization where freedom is valued must face: how do its people, or their leaders, or both, design and maintain institutions limiting those in their midst who are drawn to power.

The passage:

"But what is government ... but the greatest of all reflections on human nature? If men were angels, no government would be necessary. If angels were to govern men, neither external nor internal controls on government would be necessary. In framing a government which is to be administered by men over men, the great difficulty lies in this: you must first enable the government to control the governed; and in the next place oblige it to control itself. A dependence on the people is, no doubt, the primary control on the government; but experience has taught mankind the necessity of auxiliary precautions."

These "auxiliary precautions" include the elaborate system of checks and balances the Founders devised within the federal government, balanced by state governments (the real origin of *states rights*). Madison's discussion is confined to this apparatus. Although I don't think he or his associates would

have denied that the public *mindset*, permeating the culture and derived from its implicit philosophy or worldview, is crucial in making checks and balances work.

This was made clear by John Adams, whose letter to the Massachusetts Militia dated 11 October, 1798 contains this oft-cited passage (*italics mine*):

“ ... we have no government armed with power capable of contending with human passions unbridled by ... morality and religion. Avarice, ambition ... [and] revenge or galantry, would break the strongest cords of our Constitution as a whale goes through a net. *Our Constitution was made only for a moral and religious people. It is wholly inadequate to the government of any other....*

There are numerous such statements dating from that era. While the Founders may have differed over specifics, that the American republic was founded on a theistic worldview *is not in doubt*.

Now come with me to Federalist 10.

Madison is now warning presciently about the dangers of factions. A faction is:

“a number of citizens, whether amounting to a majority or a minority of the whole, who are united and actuated by some common impulse of passion, or of interest, adverse to the rights of other citizens, or to the permanent and aggregate interests of the community.”

What sent me to the Federalist Papers was yet another histrionic mainstream article decrying “the spread of white nationalism.” I can’t see linking to it. It’s one of dozens. Maybe hundreds.

It struck me long ago – I’ve written about the matter numerous times – that the alt-right is identity politics for white

people. Alt-right groups, having abandoned the mindset and worldview that actually made America great, want their own identity.

In that case, the best solution to the problem of “white nationalism” is to get rid of identity politics.

This should be common horse sense.

But believe it or not, I didn’t come here this morning just to say that.

While browsing the Yahoo newsfeed that turned up that article, I got to thinking about the contrast between James Madison’s writing – detailed, densely argued, *demanding* – and what passes for journalistic and other professional writing today.

First: many (most?) of what Yahoo posts aren’t *articles* at all in the usual sense but strung-together collections of tweets.

I shouldn’t pick on Yahoo. Other newsfeeds are no different.

Returning to Madison, his writing features long and involved paragraphs calling for sustained attention.

Among my projects these days is a series of articles on [Medium](#) (founded in 2012 and now a large site for writers of various stripes with numerous independent publications of its own; my [profile](#) there). Members can tailor their feed to their interests – in other words, they can create safe spaces, if you will, on the platform. Because membership is not free, the site’s owners could develop a payment mechanism for writers and simultaneously stay refreshingly free of ads. Writers are paid commensurate with reader engagement.

Among the recommendations given those who would write on the platform, though:

Use short sentences. No more than one thought per sentence.

Write in short paragraphs.

Kinda like these. Astute, long-term readers will note: my paragraphs have grown shorter over the past year or so—as copywriter training incorporates these same injunctions.

Use common words. Keep technical-sounding jargon out of nontechnical articles. (I doubt Medium’s curators would care for words like *commensurate* and *astute*.)

Be sure there is a lot of white space on your pages. White space doesn’t intimidate readers, who can always just backspace and go elsewhere.



Now go back and look at Federalist 51. Not much white space there.

One of the good things about Medium is that it’s still an independent platform. I can’t help but wonder how long that will last. Its founder, Evan Williams, is the guy who started Blogger in 1999. He sold that to Google in 2003. Then, in 2006, he created Twitter.

He’s a billionaire and doesn’t need Google. But who knows how long it will be before Google offers an eye-watering sum to Medium’s upper echelons? That, as the saying goes, will be that.

James Madison did not worry about his [Flesch-Kincaid](#) (FK) score, another invention following decades of public schooling which measures readability.

To be read online, we are now told, keep your FK score as low as possible. Your best bet is not to write above a middle-school level.

Reflecting on all this, I became depressed.

As the Western empire has grown, how far its masses have fallen!

How far we writers have to fall, if we wish to be read by people other than family, friends and maybe a few online followers.

In fairness, there's more going on here than mass illiteracy, though there's plenty of that.

Everyone now has to contend with a flood of distractions and a sense of busy-busy-busy navigating all the information coming their way. This is the most oft-cited reason for all the above advice. When readers get hundreds of emails per day and must choose between dozens of things to read, if your *title* doesn't grab them immediately, they're gone.

The amount of information available with a few mouse clicks has never been greater. We're in a period of *overproduction* of creative works: writing (emails, articles, books, e-books, blog posts, newsletters, e-newsletters, websites, etc.), art and design products, webinars, online courses by would-be influencers, etc.

So if you want to be read, keep it simple!

But were the Federalist Papers, or some equivalent, to appear in today's online world, they would not be read. Period.

The principles underlying a free civilization may not have been meant for amoral and irreligious tribes, but neither were they meant for people contending with this state of affairs!

Is this an accident?

Back in the 1980s, in his classic [Amusing Ourselves To Death](#), Neil Postman explained lucidly how corporate media, even then, designed sequences of information and rapidly-changing images

to fragment viewers' perspectives and prevent them from focusing on anything for more than a few seconds.

That was before the Internet!

This all explains, in large part, the worsening dysfunction of our political system.

Many millennials are riveted by the siren calls of socialism because they've never read or learned any history.

History is demanding.

So no, this isn't an accident.

In [Four Cardinal Errors; Reasons for the Decline of the American Republic](#) (2011) I noted how, back in the mid-1800s, the nation adopted an educational philosophy based on the Prussian idea, brought to the U.S. by Horace Mann, that children belong to the state.

Though it took a few generations, this idea spread. What we might call the corporate-state began to develop. We gravitated towards schools designed to train employees.

Materialism, as I've also noted [elsewhere](#), had become the dominant worldview in the intellectual centers. Materialism, as I generally use the term, is a philosophy of nature, not a theory of political economy, or economics. But one would be crazy to think the first will not affect the second, and that this wouldn't affect beliefs people hold about one another, and in particular, attitudes of the moneyed elite towards unmoneyed masses. (These might never have been good, but if it's a matter of degree, the situation worsened as materialism spread from universities to business and the culture generally.)

The Rockefeller-founded General Education Board statement in its Occasional Paper #1 (1903) is well known to historians of our situation (*italics mine*):

"In our dreams, we have limitless resources and the people yield themselves with perfect docility to our molding hands. *The present education conventions* fade from their minds, and *unhampered by tradition*, we work our own good will upon a grateful and responsive rural folk. We shall not try to make these people or any of their children into philosophers or men of learning, or men of science. We have not to raise up from among them authors, editors, poets or men of letters. We shall not search for embryo great artists, painters, musicians nor lawyers, doctors, preachers, politicians, statesmen, of whom we have an ample supply... The task we set before ourselves is very simple as well as a very beautiful one, to train these people as we find them to a perfectly ideal life just where they are. So we will organize our children and teach them to do in a perfect way the things their fathers and mothers are doing in an imperfect way, in the homes, in the shops and on the farm."

The purpose of schools became, little by little, the assembly-line like production of obedient workers and consumers, their behavior predictable and controllable through incentives and reinforcement mechanisms lavishly-funded behavior psychologists claimed to be uncovering.

The Rockefeller Foundation bankrolled John Dewey and the "progressive" movement in education, which furthered such goals under the idea that education's purpose is not literacy or informed citizenship but "adjustment to a changing world."

Once the income tax was instituted, this included producing loyal taxpayers. And with the U.S. entry into the Great War as it was then called in Europe, it incorporated a faux patriotism to incentivize support for the latest ventures of an incipient but growing war machine.

This machine, and the tax machine behind it to finance expansionist government, had the support of both major

parties. Both would widen over time, as controls over power (corporations as well as government) by “we the people” progressively narrowed.

Carroll Quigley, Georgetown University professor of government in that institution’s School of Foreign Service, stated in [Tragedy & Hope](#) (1966):

“The chief problem of American political life for a long time has been how to make the two Congressional parties more national and international. [The argument that the two parties should represent opposed ideals and policies, one, perhaps, of the Right and the other of the Left, is a foolish idea acceptable only to doctrinaire and academic thinkers. Instead, the two parties should be almost identical, so that the American people can ‘throw the rascals out’ at any election without leading to any profound or extensive shifts in policy.... \[E\]ither part in office becomes in time corrupt, tired, unenterprising, and vigorless. Then it should be possible to replace it, every four years if necessary, by the other party, which will be none of these things but will still pursue, with new vigor, approximately the same basic policies.](#)”

One thinks of Vietnam, the financialization of the economy, NAFTA, GATT II, the WTO, etc., as the American middle class, having achieved a certain level of financial independence, was systemically gutted, eventually reaching its present state where Wall Street soars and Main Street suffers.

Fast forward to the present.

The stunning exception to this pattern has been President Donald Trump. And with that alone, we’ve explained the unbridled hostility the president has faced since before Day One, and which looks likely to worsen as 2020 approaches.

We are now being hammered with the latest impeachment gambit – over a [lawful](#) phone call by the president to the newly-elected

president of Ukraine, and an act of “whistleblowing” that has [Deep Establishment](#) written all over it.

It is significant that Trump’s enemies are also enemies of BREXIT, of Viktor Orbán in Hungary, Jarosław Kaczyński in Poland, and Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil. While none of these are perfect, anymore than Trump is perfect, all are footdraggers against the central tendency of the past 70 years: the funneling of wealth and power in a single direction of economic integration, something which can only end with a *de facto* world state able to service global corporations – reducing the world’s populations to precarity and indebtedness. For decades this effort advanced using mechanisms ranging from incentives to threats of economic sanction and overthrow of democratically elected governments of the noncompliant to military invasion. After the collapse of the Soviet Union the consolidation of wealth and power accelerated.

Higher education is now dysfunctional. Social justice warriors and attacks on free speech are hardly the only problems. They may not even be the worst!

Detailed studies (e.g., that of [Richard Arum and Josipa Roksa 2011](#)) show that students learn little during their first two years on campus.

I recommend Jason Brennan and Phillip Magness’s new [Cracks in the Ivory Tower: the Moral Mess of Higher Education \(2019\)](#). This superbly documented book walks us through the failings of higher ed one by one, revealing the perverse incentives responsible for administrative bloat, skyrocketing tuition, and the overproduction of PhDs which has precipitated the adjunct crisis.

This last has to do with as much as 70 percent of those teaching undergraduates being part-timers paid unlivable wages – while university presidents are paid six and sometimes seven

figures counting “perks” – and while millions are spent on new buildings, the latest computers and software for technology centers, new gym equipment, etc.

Brennan and Magness have a few blind spots (in my humble opinion). By attacking what they call “gremlins” and “poltergeists” (metaphors for what others call “conspiracy theories”), they seem to imply that all this happened due to a long string of bad policy decisions, not through a century-long effort to manage a population of controllable sheep.

We can be grateful that this effort hasn’t succeeded with everyone! The panic over Trump, the fact that sites like this one exist, that people can still write about the Federalist Papers, are proof of that.

The educational arena is wide open to genuinely new ideas and endeavors. I do not refer to existing for-profit entities, many of which are as disastrous as the mainstream ones. We see some – although they are highly “niched” and promoting specific programs or agendas. There are vast areas not dealt with on a large scale: financial literacy, our health care system as well as how to pay for it (which will remain a shambles until some specific preventative ideas are adopted), taking technology back from Big Tech, and above all, a renewed respect for critical thinking and for the idea of truth itself.

We need institutions able to deliver educational benefits for a fair and honest price, without the bureaucratic and other baggage, having designed curriculums not locked into an obsolete four-year model.

And without ties to accreditation agencies also pushing agendas.

Were employers to cease looking at sheepskins, the present system would collapse. It is absurdly expensive, bloated with administrative parasites, stuck with admissions processes

easily gamed by celebrities and others with money [as we've recently seen](#), and rife with people [who don't care about anything except their political agendas](#). Many of those entrusted to teach and tutor students have workloads of as many as six courses on multiple campuses, and cannot meet with students outside of class because when class ends they are high-tailing it to their next job a hundred miles away ("freeway fliers," they're called).

This system should be scrapped, not fixed.

My hope, and vision, is that new *general* institutions will begin to replace it during the decade to come, that they will gain support from those weary of the dysfunctional status quo, and that students will flock to them drawn by cheaper prices, better quality, and freedom from presently-dominant orthodoxies and ideologies. They will be highly mobile, and probably headquartered outside the U.S., ensuring freedom from being regulated back into ineffectiveness.

We will then, again, see hope of checking the unbridled pursuit of power, because our founding documents will once again be read. We will see the divisive and dangerous nature of identity politics. Among much else able to make life slightly better in this fallen world.

[Author's note: donate to NewsWithViews.com [here](#). Should you wish to support me personally, great, I accept tips! I have revived my [Patreon page](#), where I anticipate posting content not available elsewhere. Or you can use PayPal via my email address to make a one-time donation.

As everyone knows, alternatives to Establishment corporate media are under direct attack. There is Google's algorithmic censorship as well as the deplatforming we have seen on YouTube. Those not supporting official narratives are being kicked off Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook, which will no longer link to sites accused of delivering – we still have no

definition of the term – “hate speech.”

Everyone is hurt by this!

*Sites like NewsWithViews.com, and self-employed writers like myself, are being relegated to invisibility, and ultimately will not survive unless readers donate. If you value content not beholden to the [Deep Establishment](#), then support it! This is **your** site, too! My articles are **your** articles! **Our** free speech rights translate into **your** right to receive truthful information you won't get from CNN or MSNBC! Absent donations, we **all** run the risk of “going dark” very soon; **this could well be the last article of this sort I can make time for!**]*

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