

DIGITAL AMNESIA: THE FOG WE LIVE IN



There is a palpable twilight fog that has gathered around us. Like the Arctic in winter, we never emerge into full light. We aren't particularly angry about it. There are times when we struggle to remember what our lives were like before Facebook, Google, YouTube, Twitter, and cable news. We know those lives were different, but we can't remember how. There is a sense of sadness and dread, knowing that things are going terribly wrong, that the institutions we learned about in high school don't seem to be working very well. History has become a fog of lies, repeated and slightly modified day after day, every hour of the day. We are sometimes outraged, but it is hard to know exactly why. Is it the kidnapping of thousands of immigrant children and their disappearance into the fog? Is it the Republican theft of election after election (not exclusively in the South) through intimidation, disinformation, and the purge of voter rolls, all done in plain sight? Is it the fact that we have a treasonous clown in the White House who wouldn't have lasted a month in any previous time? But it's hard to maintain a proper appreciation of his open obstruction of virtually every institution of American government, or to keep

track of his open collusion with the Russian government in the oval office, Helsinki, and other places, even though we know that the intelligence agencies and Mueller have even more damning information.

There is a constant state of unease in our stomachs. It's not exactly nausea, although it often comes close to that. Our dreams, when we awake, slip away quickly. We wonder if these recent dreams of ours are different from those of our childhood. Those could have been terrifying too, but usually we knew why and remembered them vividly.

In the last two and a half years I have felt a strong sense of déjà vu—something from years ago. It wasn't the Vietnam era. There was nothing foggy about our emotional state then: it was red hot anger. Just recently I realized that I'm reminded of the fear and anxiety of my childhood and adolescence in the 1950s and 1960s. But the source of our fear in that period was as clear as our current situation is confused. It is best illustrated by a recurring dream I had in those days. I'm standing on a second story balcony, looking out over a forest. Suddenly there is a blinding flash in the distance. My heart sinks. What we always feared has actually

happened. I have only seconds before my incineration, time for one last breath.

The belief in the inevitability of nuclear annihilation was widespread in that time. It was not paranoia; we came within hours of that fate during the Cuban missile crisis. We were saved by a miraculous, last minute linkage of phones that put JFK and Nikita Khrushchev in touch with one another. Otherwise the nightmare of buildings, vehicles, trees, and people vaporized by the thermonuclear shock wave would have come true.

Not everyone in 2019 America is living in a fog. There are a number of organizations, some exclusively American, like ALEC and the Koch Brothers Foundation, and some international, like the Davos World Economic Forum, that seem to be quite focused on what they want to accomplish. The members of ALEC include most of the major players in energy, pharma, insurance, banking, utilities, communications, and many other areas. They literally write the legislation they want state legislatures and the Congress to enact, with the obvious proviso that there will be no campaign contributions unless they succeed. The Koch Brothers have their annual meeting in Indian Wells,

near Palm Springs. A minimum ante, just to get in the door, is \$100,000. But there are at least 500 mega-donors, and collectively they raise over \$400,000,000 a year to advance corporate interests through campaign donations. There are 1500 private jets parked in the airport every year at Davos. I would humbly suggest that they are not there for a ski vacation, any more than the Indian Wells participants are in Southern California for golf.

During George H. W. Bush's presidency there were many theories about his connections to the Yale Skull & Bones secret society, the Trilateral Commission, Bilderberg, etc. The press, by and large, was amused by those concerns: tin foil hats. From where we stand now, the specifics of the collaborations of the ultra-wealthy are irrelevant. What matters is the outcome. In a few decades there has been a stupendous and pernicious transfer of wealth from the middle class to the top .01%, here and around the world. You can quibble about how they did it, but you can't argue with the fact that they got it done. They knew exactly what

they wanted: ridiculously low top tier personal income and corporate tax rates, cheap labor, automation, the reduction or elimination of corporate contributions to employee health care, social security, and retirement. They also wanted the elimination of regulation of any kind, including environmental, banking, and antitrust. Donald Trump has already gone a long way toward making their dream a reality. Why? To put more money in their pockets. The heck with tossing crumbs to the little people—let's just keep it all. This is no cabal; it's all being done in plain sight.

In the movie "Patton," after the defeat of the German panzer forces in North Africa, the general gloats: "Rommel, you magnificent bastard! I read your book." I'm not very fond of Patton's politics, but I agree with the strategy. We need to take the organizing principles of ALEC and all the other corporate organizations and use them against the masters of the universe themselves. If they could do it, so can we. They meet, organize, and strategize face to face, not through social media. The power and force that comes from organizing the

old-fashioned way, as many of us did in the 2018 elections, clears the fog. When you see yourself as part of a finite group, and that group is, in turn, networking with similar groups, it is much easier to stay awake. Political elections are important, but they are not the only theater of action. Shining the light on ALEC and those who are involved has already led to some corporate withdrawals. With enough high-profile public shaming, ALEC could be crushed. If Exxon can run ads claiming that they help the environment and give everyone jobs, then a hard-hitting counterattack ad would dispose of that strategy pretty quickly.

Yes, wealth taxes. Yes, a 70% tax rate on any money after the first 10 million dollars of income. That is about taking our own money back. Yes, bringing dark money to light and making those donors pay a price. But it will take a major, sustained fight to succeed. We must look at ourselves in the mirror every morning and say, "Yes, we can do it." The only help we will get in this endeavor is what we provide ourselves. The fog won't burn off on its own.

