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INTELLECTUALS AND SOCIETY

Revised and Enlarged Edition

by THOMAS SOWELL

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PART I — INTRODUCTION

Chapter 1 — Intellect and Intellectuals

Intellect is not wisdom. . . . Sheer brainpower—intellect, the capacity to grasp and manipulate complex concepts and ideas—can be put at the service of concepts and ideas that lead to mistaken conclusions and unwise actions, in light of all the factors involved, including factors left out of some of the ingenious theories constructed by the intellect.

Brilliance—even genius—is no guarantee that consequential factors have not been left out or misconceived. . . .

Sowell, Thomas (2012-03-06). Intellectuals and Society (Kindle Locations 189-192). Perseus Books Group. Kindle Edition.

INTELLIGENCE VERSUS INTELLECT

The capacity to grasp and manipulate complex ideas is enough to define intellect but not enough to encompass intelligence, which involves combining intellect with judgment . . .

Intelligence minus judgment equals intellect. Wisdom is the rarest quality of all—the ability to combine intellect, knowledge, experience, and judgment in a way to produce a coherent understanding. Wisdom is the fulfillment of the ancient admonition, “With all your getting, get understanding.” Wisdom requires self-discipline and an understanding of the realities of the world, including the limitations of one’s own experience and of reason itself. The opposite of high intellect is dullness or slowness, but the opposite of wisdom is foolishness, which is far more dangerous.

George Orwell said that some ideas are so foolish that only an intellectual could believe them, for no ordinary man could be such a fool. The record of twentieth century intellectuals was especially appalling in this regard. Scarcely a mass-murdering dictator of the twentieth century was without his intellectual supporters, not simply in his own country, but also in foreign democracies, where people were free to say whatever they wished. Lenin, Stalin, Mao, and Hitler all had their admirers, defenders, and apologists among the intelligentsia in Western democratic nations, despite the fact that these dictators each ended up killing people of their own country on a scale unprecedented even by despotic regimes that preceded them.

Sowell, Thomas (2012-03-06). Intellectuals and Society (Kindle Locations 199-211). Perseus Books Group. Kindle Edition.

Defining Intellectuals

We must be clear about what we mean by intellectuals. Here “intellectuals” refers to an occupational category, people whose occupations deal primarily with ideas—writers, academics, and the like. Most of us do not think of brain surgeons or engineers as intellectuals, despite the demanding mental training that each goes through and despite the intellectual challenges of their occupations. Similarly, virtually no one regards even the most brilliant and successful financial wizard as an intellectual.

At the core of the notion of an intellectual is the dealer in ideas, as such—not the personal application of ideas . . .

Sowell, Thomas (2012-03-06). Intellectuals and Society (Kindle Locations 212-217). Perseus Books Group. Kindle Edition.

IDEAS AND ACCOUNTABILITY

Accountability

One of the surprising privileges of intellectuals is that they are free to be scandalously asinine without harming their reputation. The intellectuals who idolized Stalin while he was purging millions and stifling the least stirring of freedom have not been discredited. They are still holding forth on every topic under the sun and are listened to with deference. . . .

Sowell, Thomas (2012-03-06). Intellectuals and Society (Kindle Locations 313-315). Perseus Books Group. Kindle Edition.

Environmentalist Paul Ehrlich said in 1968: “The battle to feed all of humanity is over. In the 1970’s the world will undergo famines—hundreds of millions of people are going to starve to death in spite of any crash programs embarked upon now.” Yet, after that decade— and later decades—had come and gone, not only had nothing of the sort happened, a growing problem in a growing number of countries was obesity and unsalable agricultural surpluses. But Professor Ehrlich continued to receive not only popular acclaim but also honors and grants from prestigious academic institutions.

Similarly, Ralph Nader first became a major public figure with the 1965 publication of his book *Unsafe at Any Speed*, which depicted American cars in general, and the Corvair in particular, as accident-prone. Yet, despite the fact that empirical studies showed the Corvair to be at least as safe as other cars of its day, Nader not only continued to have credibility but acquired a reputation for idealism and insight that made him something of a secular saint. Innumerable other wrong predictions, about everything from the price of gasoline to the outcome of Cold War policies, have left innumerable other false prophets with just as much honor as if they had been truly prophetic. In short, constraints which apply to people in most other fields do not apply even approximately equally to intellectuals.

Sowell, Thomas (2012-03-06). Intellectuals and Society (Kindle Locations 318-329). Perseus Books Group. Kindle Edition.

Chapter 2 — Knowledge and Notions

Visiting the United States in 1933, George Bernard Shaw said, “You Americans are so fearful of dictators. Dictatorship is the only way in which government can accomplish anything. See what a mess democracy has led to. Why are you afraid of dictatorship?” Leaving London for a vacation in South Africa in 1935, Shaw declared, “It is nice to go for a holiday and know that Hitler has settled everything so well in Europe.” While Hitler’s anti-Jewish actions eventually alienated Shaw, the famous playwright remained partial to the Soviet dictatorship. In 1939, after the Nazi-Soviet pact, Shaw said: “Herr Hitler is under the powerful thumb of Stalin, whose interest in peace is overwhelming. And everyone except myself is frightened out of his or her wits!” A week later, the Second World War began, with Hitler invading Poland from the west, followed by Stalin invading from the east.

. . . As George J. Stigler said of some of his fellow Nobel Laureates, they “issue stern ultimata to the public on almost a monthly basis, and sometimes on no other basis.”

The fatal misstep of such intellectuals is assuming that superior ability within a particular realm can be generalized as superior wisdom or morality over all. . . . What was said of John Maynard Keynes by his biographer and fellow economist Roy Harrod could be said of many other intellectuals:

He held forth on a great range of topics, on some of which he was thoroughly expert, but on others of which he may have derived his views from the few pages of a book at which he had happened to glance. The air of authority was the same in both cases.

What many intellectuals seem not to understand is that even being the world’s leading authority on a particular subject, such as admiralty law or Mayan civilization, does not confer even minimal competence on other subjects, such as antitrust law, environmental issues or foreign policy. As British writer Lowes Dickinson said of scientists, “beside being prejudiced, they suppose that the fact that they are men of science gives their prejudices value.”

Sowell, Thomas (2012-03-06). Intellectuals and Society (Kindle Locations 357-380). Perseus Books Group. Kindle Edition.

COMPETING CONCEPTS OF KNOWLEDGE

Concentration and Dispersion of Knowledge

. . . free markets, judicial restraint, and reliance on decisions and traditions growing out of the experiences of the many—rather than the presumptions of an elite few—are so important to those who do not share the social vision prevalent among intellectual elites. . . . “In general, ‘the market’ is smarter than the smartest of its individual participants,” is the way the late Robert L. Bartley, editor of the **Wall Street Journal**, expressed his belief. . .

Sowell, Thomas (2012-03-06). Intellectuals and Society (Kindle Locations 449-454). Perseus Books Group. Kindle Edition.

The ignorance, prejudices, and groupthink of an educated elite are still ignorance, prejudice, and groupthink—and for those with one percent of the knowledge in a society to be guiding or controlling those with the other 99 percent is as perilous as it is absurd.

Sowell, Thomas (2012-03-06). Intellectuals and Society (Kindle Locations 467-469). Perseus Books Group. Kindle Edition.

Since many, if not most, intellectuals operate under the implicit assumption that knowledge is already concentrated—in people like themselves—they are especially susceptible to the idea that a

corresponding concentration of decision-making power in a public-spirited elite can benefit society. That assumption has been the foundation for reform movements like Progressivism in the United States and revolutionary movements in various other countries around the world. Moreover, with sufficient knowledge being considered already concentrated, those with this view often conceive that what needs to be done is to create an accompanying will and power to deal collectively with a wide array of social problems. Emphasis on “will,” “commitment,” “caring” or “compassion,” as crucial ingredients for dealing with social issues implicitly assumes away the question whether those who are presumed to have these qualities also have sufficient knowledge.

Sowell, Thomas (2012-03-06). Intellectuals and Society (Kindle Locations 475-482). Perseus Books Group. Kindle Edition.

Since intellectuals have every incentive to emphasize the importance of the special kind of knowledge that they have, relative to the mundane knowledge that others have, they are often advocates of courses of action which ignore the value, the cost, and the consequences of mundane knowledge.

Sowell, Thomas (2012-03-06). Intellectuals and Society (Kindle Locations 485-487). Perseus Books Group. Kindle Edition.

It is common for intellectuals to act as if their special kind of knowledge of generalities can and should substitute for, and override, the mundane specific knowledge of others. This emphasis on the special knowledge of intellectuals often leads to the dismissing of mundane, first-hand knowledge as “prejudices” or “stereotypes,” in favor of abstract beliefs common among the intelligentsia, who may have little or no first-hand knowledge of the individuals, organizations or concrete circumstances involved.

Sowell, Thomas (2012-03-06). Intellectuals and Society (Kindle Locations 500-504). Perseus Books Group. Kindle Edition.

One small but revealing example of the social consequences of this attitude is that many company policies of establishing retirement ages for their employees have been made illegal as “age discrimination” because those policies are said to be based on stereotypes about the elderly, who can be productive beyond the age of “mandatory retirement.” In other words, third parties with no stake in the outcome, no direct experience in the particular companies or industries, and no knowledge of the particular individual employees involved, are assumed to have superior understanding of the effects of age than those who do have such experience, such a stake, and such direct knowledge, mundane though that knowledge may be.

Sowell, Thomas (2012-03-06). Intellectuals and Society (Kindle Locations 505-510). Perseus Books Group. Kindle Edition.

Experts

The simple fact that central planners in the Soviet Union had more than 24 million prices to set shows the absurdity of the task undertaken by central planning. That central planning has failed repeatedly in countries around the world, among both democracies and dictatorships, can hardly be surprising because the central planners could not possibly be experts—or even competent—on all the things under their control. The fact that central planning was abandoned by country after country in the late twentieth century—even in countries with communist or socialist governments—suggests the depth and undeniability of that failure.

While lawyers and judges are experts on legal principles, and have valuable roles to play within their expertise, both have over the years increasingly moved beyond those roles to using law “as an instrument of social change”— which is to say, making amateur decisions on complex matters extending

far beyond the narrow boundaries of their professional expertise. Moreover, the consensus of like-minded experts on matters beyond their expertise has emboldened many legal experts—like experts in other fields—to imagine that the difference between their elite group perceptions and those of other people is almost axiomatically a difference between knowledgeable people and the uninformed masses.

Among the many examples of this attitude was a 1960s judicial conference where a retired police commissioner attempted to explain to the judges and law professors present how the courts' recent expansions of criminals' legal rights undermined the effectiveness of law enforcement. Among those present were Supreme Court Justice William J. Brennan and Chief Justice Earl Warren, both of whom remained "stony-faced" during the police commissioner's presentation, according to a *New York Times* account, but later "roared with laughter" after a law professor arose to pour ridicule on what the police commissioner had just said. Yet such scornful dismissal was not based on any factual evidence—and evidence subsequently accumulating over the years made painfully clear that law enforcement was in fact breaking down, to an accompanying skyrocketing of crime rates.

Sowell, Thomas (2012-03-06). Intellectuals and Society (Kindle Locations 598-616). Perseus Books Group. Kindle Edition.

THE ROLE OF REASON

Reason and Justification

. . . many of the intelligentsia express not only surprise but outrage at the number of shots fired by the police in some confrontation with a criminal, even if many of these intellectuals have never fired a gun in their lives, much less faced life-and-death dangers requiring split-second decisions. Seldom, if ever, do the intelligentsia find it necessary to seek out any information on the accuracy of pistols when fired under stress, before venting their feelings and demanding changes. In reality, a study by the New York City Police Department found that, even within a range of only six feet, just over half the shots fired by police missed completely. At distances from 16 to 25 yards—less than the distance from first base to second base on a baseball diamond—only 14 percent of the shots hit.

However surprising such facts might be to those who have never fired a pistol, even at a stationary target in the safety and calm of a pistol range, much less in the scramble and stress of life-and-death dangers with moving targets, what is crucial here is that so many of the intelligentsia and those whom they influence have seen no reason to seek such factual information before venting their outrage, in utter ignorance of the facts. Moreover, even a criminal who is hit by a bullet is not necessarily rendered instantly harmless, so there is no reason to stop firing, so long as that criminal continues to be a danger. But such mundane knowledge has been of no interest to those joining elite group expressions of indignation over things beyond their experience or competence.

To demand that things justify themselves before the bar of reason, in a world where no one has even one percent of all consequential knowledge, is to demand that ignorance be convinced and its permission obtained. . . .

Sowell, Thomas (2012-03-06). Intellectuals and Society (Kindle Locations 633-647). Perseus Books Group. Kindle Edition.

. . . There are far more incentives to invest time and attention in decisions with major direct personal consequences to oneself than to invest similar amounts of time and attention to casting one vote among millions in decisions that will affect mostly other people, and whose effect on oneself is unlikely to be changed by how one's own single vote among millions is cast.

Sowell, Thomas (2012-03-06). Intellectuals and Society (Kindle Locations 660-662). Perseus Books Group. Kindle Edition.

PART II — INTELLECTUALS AND ECONOMICS

Chapter 3 — "Income Distribution"

EMPIRICAL EVIDENCE

As with other data, data on those who were among the top 400 income earners from 1992 to 2000 were not data on the same 400 people throughout that span of time. During that span, there were thousands of people in the top 400—which is to say, turnover was high. Fewer than one-fourth of all the people in that category during that span of years were in that category more than one year, and fewer than 13 percent were in that same category more than two years.

Sowell, Thomas (2012-03-06). Intellectuals and Society (Kindle Locations 830-833). Perseus Books Group. Kindle Edition.

Just over half of all Americans earning at or near the minimum wage are from 16 to 24 years of age—and of course these individuals cannot remain from 16 to 24 years of age indefinitely, though that age category can of course continue indefinitely, providing many intellectuals with data to fit their preconceptions. Only by focusing on the income brackets, instead of the actual people moving between those brackets, have the intelligentsia been able to verbally create a “problem” for which a “solution” is necessary. They have created a powerful vision of “classes” with “disparities” and “inequities” in income, caused by “barriers” created by “society.” But the routine rise of millions of people out of the lowest quintile over time makes a mockery of the “barriers” assumed by many, if not most, of the intelligentsia.

Sowell, Thomas (2012-03-06). Intellectuals and Society (Kindle Locations 844-850). Perseus Books Group. Kindle Edition.

The confusion between statistical categories and flesh-and-blood human beings is compounded when there is confusion between income and wealth. People called “rich” or “super-rich” have been given these titles by the media on the basis of income, not wealth, even though being rich means having more wealth. According to the Treasury Department: “Among those with the very highest incomes in 1996—the top 1/100 of 1 percent—only 25 percent remained in this group in 2005.” If these were genuinely super-rich people, it is hard to explain why three-quarters of them are no longer in that category a decade later.

Sowell, Thomas (2012-03-06). Intellectuals and Society (Kindle Locations 855-859). Perseus Books Group. Kindle Edition.

... over the entire period from 1967 to 2005, median real household income—that is, money income adjusted for inflation—rose by 31 percent. For selected periods within that long span, real household incomes rose even less, and those selected periods have often been cited by the intelligentsia to claim that income and living standards have “stagnated.” Meanwhile, real per capita income rose by 122 percent over that same span, from 1967 to 2005. When a more than doubling of real income per person is called “stagnation,” that is one of the many feats of verbal virtuosity. The reason for the large discrepancy between growth rate trends in household income and growth rate trends in individual income is very straightforward: The number of persons per household has been declining over the years. . . .

Sowell, Thomas (2012-03-06). Intellectuals and Society (Kindle Locations 861-868). Perseus Books Group. Kindle Edition.

Despite such obvious and mundane facts, household or family income statistics continue to be widely cited in the media and in academia—and per capita income statistics continue to be widely ignored, despite the fact that households are variable in size, while per capita income always refers to the income of one person. However, the statistics that the intelligentsia keep citing are much more consistent with their vision of America than the statistics they keep ignoring.

Sowell, Thomas (2012-03-06). Intellectuals and Society (Kindle Locations 873-876). Perseus Books Group. Kindle Edition.

Many income statistics are misleading in another sense, when they leave out the income received in kind—such as food stamps and subsidized housing—which often exceeds the value of the cash income received by people in the lower-income brackets. In 2001, for example, transfers in cash or in kind accounted for more than three-quarters of the total economic resources at the disposal of people in the bottom 20 percent. In other words, the standard of living of people in the bottom quintile is about three times what their earned income statistics would indicate.

Sowell, Thomas (2012-03-06). Intellectuals and Society (Kindle Locations 886-890). Perseus Books Group. Kindle Edition.

MORAL CONSIDERATIONS

... most of those Americans now living below the official poverty line have possessions once considered part of a middle class standard of living, just a generation or so ago.

Sowell, Thomas (2012-03-06). Intellectuals and Society (Kindle Locations 900-901). Perseus Books Group. Kindle Edition.

Undefined terms like “basic necessities” and arbitrarily defined terms like “poverty” allow such rhetoric to flourish, independently of documented facts about rising living standards in the lower income brackets. While such alarmist rhetoric abounds, specifics are conspicuous by their absence. At one time, poverty meant that people were hungry or couldn’t afford adequate clothing to protect themselves against the elements. Today it means whatever those who define the official poverty level want it to mean, so that saying that X percent of the American population live in poverty is to say that they meet some ultimately arbitrary definition, which could be set higher or lower, causing half as many or twice as many to be called “poor.” Moreover, the income statistics so often cited tell us very little about the actual standard of living among people who receive the majority of their economic resources **over and above** whatever incomes they may be earning.

Sowell, Thomas (2012-03-06). Intellectuals and Society (Kindle Locations 909-916). Perseus Books Group. Kindle Edition.

THE POOR AS CONSUMERS

The underlying costs of providing financial services to people in low-income neighborhoods are likewise ignored by much, if not most, of the intelligentsia. Instead, the high rates of interest charged on personal loans to the poor are enough to set off orgies of denunciation and demands for government intervention to put an end to “exploitative” and “unconscionable” interest rates. Here verbal virtuosity is often used by stating interest rates in annual percentage terms, when in fact loans made in low-income neighborhoods are often made for a matter of weeks, or even days, to meet some exigency of the moment. The sums of money lent are usually a few hundred dollars, lent for a few weeks, with interest charges of about \$15 per \$100 lent. That works out to annual interest rates in the hundreds—the kind of statistics that produce sensations in the media and in politics.

The costs behind such charges are seldom, if ever, investigated by the intelligentsia, by so-called “consumer advocates” or by others in the business of creating sensations and denouncing businesses

that they know little or nothing about. The economic consequences of government intervention to limit the annual interest rate can be seen in a number of states where such limits have been imposed. After Oregon imposed a limit of 36 percent annual interest, three-quarters of its “payday loan” businesses closed down. Nor is it hard to see why—if one bothers to look at facts. At a 36 percent limit on the annual interest rate, the \$15 in interest charged for every \$100 lent would be reduced to less than \$1.50 for a loan payable in two weeks—an amount not likely to cover even the cost of processing the loan, much less the risks of making the loan.

As for the low-income borrower, supposedly the reason for the concern of the moral elites, denying the borrower the \$100 needed to meet some exigency must be weighed against the \$15 paid for getting the money to meet that exigency. Why that trade-off decision should be forcibly removed by law from the person most knowledgeable about the situation, as well as most affected by it, and transferred to third parties far removed in specific knowledge and general circumstances, is a question that is seldom answered or even asked. With intellectuals who consider themselves knowledgeable, as well as compassionate, it would seldom occur to them to regard themselves as interfering with things of which they are very ignorant—and doing so at costs imposed on people far less fortunate than themselves.

A *New York Times* editorial, for example, denounced the payday loan providers’ “triple-digit annual interest rates, milking people’s desperation” and “profiteering with the cloak of capitalist virtue.” It described a 36 percent interest rate ceiling as something needed to prevent “the egregious exploitation of payday loans.” How much good it may have done the *New York Times* to say such things tells us nothing about whether it did any good for the poor to have one of their already limited options taken off the table.

None of this, however, is peculiar to the *New York Times* or to payday loans. Any number of ways in which poor people adjust to their poverty are shocking to people who have more money and more options—as well as more presumptions. The housing that the poor live in, for example, has long offended more affluent third party observers, who have often led political crusades to tear down “substandard” housing, removing the “blight” (and the poor) from their sight. This usually leaves the poor with no better options than before, unless forcing them to pay more for more upscale housing than they wanted—and which they had the option to pay for before—is somehow considered to be better. Reducing people’s already limited options can hardly be considered to be making them better off, unless you are convinced of your own superior wisdom and virtue. But, as someone has pointed out, a fool can put on his coat better than a wise man can put it on for him.

Nothing is easier than coming up with housing standards reflecting what upscale third party “reformers” would like to see, at no cost to themselves. Such housing reformers have destroyed whole neighborhoods as “blighted,” over the years chasing the poor from one neighborhood to another. In San Francisco, the net effect of such zealotry has been to chase huge numbers of blacks completely out of the city. By the early twenty-first century, the black population of San Francisco was less than half of what it had been in 1970. None of this is peculiar to blacks or to San Francisco, or even to housing reformers or critics of payday loans. These are just some of the ways in which the anointed can feel good about themselves, while leaving havoc in their wake.

Sowell, Thomas (2012-03-06). Intellectuals and Society (Kindle Locations 991-1026). Perseus Books Group. Kindle Edition.

Chapter 4 — Economic Systems

The most fundamental fact of economics, without which there would be no economics, is that what everybody wants always adds up to more than there is. . . .

Sowell, Thomas (2012-03-06). Intellectuals and Society (Kindle Locations 1028-1029). Perseus Books Group. Kindle Edition.

. . . Nothing is easier than simply assuming that things were better before, and nothing is harder than finding evidence of better housing, higher wages and shorter hours in the nineteenth and earlier centuries, whether in industry or agriculture. . . .

Sowell, Thomas (2012-03-06). Intellectuals and Society (Kindle Locations 1055-1056). Perseus Books Group. Kindle Edition.

. . . The idea of killing the messenger who brings bad news is one of the oldest and simplest examples. But the fundamental principle is still alive and well today, when charges of racial discrimination are made against banks that turn down a higher proportion of black applicants for mortgage loans than of white applicants.

Sowell, Thomas (2012-03-06). Intellectuals and Society (Kindle Locations 1057-1059). Perseus Books Group. Kindle Edition.

. . . The fact that black-owned banks also turn down black applicants at a higher rate than white applicants, and that white-owned banks turn down white applicants at a higher rate than Asian American applicants, reinforces the point—but only for those who check out the facts that are seldom mentioned in the media, which is preoccupied with moral melodrama that fits their vision. Among the many differences among black, white and Asian Americans is that the average credit rating among whites is higher than among blacks and the average credit rating of Asian Americans is higher than among whites.

In light of the many differences among these three groups, it is hardly surprising that, while blacks were turned down for mortgage loans at twice the rate for whites in 2000, whites were turned down at nearly twice the rate for Asian Americans. But only the black-white comparison saw the light of day in much of the media.

Sowell, Thomas (2012-03-06). Intellectuals and Society (Kindle Locations 1063-1071). Perseus Books Group. Kindle Edition.

CHAOS VERSUS COMPETITION

. . . Greed may well explain an individual's *desire* for more money, but income is determined by what other people pay, whether those *other people* are employers or consumers. Except for criminals, most people in a market economy receive income as a result of voluntary transactions. How much income someone receives voluntarily depends on other people's willingness to part with their money in exchange for what the recipient offers, whether that is labor, a commodity or a service. John D. Rockefeller did not become rich simply because he wanted money; he became rich because other people preferred to buy his oil, for example, because it was cheaper. Bill Gates became rich because people around the world preferred to buy his computer operating system rather than other operating systems that were available.

Sowell, Thomas (2012-03-06). Intellectuals and Society (Kindle Locations 1218-1223). Perseus Books Group. Kindle Edition.

... Professor Peter Corning of Stanford University, for example, attributes high incomes to personality traits found supposedly in one-third of the population because “the ‘free market’ capitalist system favors the one-third who are the most acquisitive and egocentric and the least concerned about fairness and justice.” This description would apply as readily to petty criminals who rob local stores and sometimes shoot their owners to avoid being identified, often for small sums of money that would never support the lifestyle of the rich and famous.

Sowell, Thomas (2012-03-06). Intellectuals and Society (Kindle Locations 1225-1229). Perseus Books Group. Kindle Edition.

... Contrary to “robber baron” rhetoric, Rockefeller did not reduce the wealth of society but added to it, his own fortune being a share in that additional wealth, as his production efficiencies and innovations reduced the public’s cost of oil to a fraction of what it had been before.

Sowell, Thomas (2012-03-06). Intellectuals and Society (Kindle Locations 1235-1237). Perseus Books Group. Kindle Edition.

ZERO SUM ECONOMICS

... transactions would not continue to take place unless **both** sides find these transactions preferable to not making such transactions.

Sowell, Thomas (2012-03-06). Intellectuals and Society (Kindle Locations 1244-1245). Perseus Books Group. Kindle Edition.

... It is literally preposterous (putting in front what comes behind) to begin the analysis with “a sum to divide”—that is, wealth—when that wealth can be created only **after** capital and labor have already reconciled their competing claims and agreed to terms on which they can operate together to produce that wealth.

Each side would of course prefer to have the terms favor themselves more, but both sides must be willing to accept some mutually agreeable terms or no such transaction will take place at all, much less continue. Far from being an “irreconcilable” situation, as Laski claimed, it is a situation reconciled millions of times each day. Otherwise, the economy could not function. Indeed, a whole society could not function without vast numbers of both economic and non-economic decisions to cooperate, despite the fact that no two sets of interests, even among members of the same family, are exactly the same. The habit of many intellectuals to largely ignore the prerequisites, incentives and constraints involved in the production of wealth has many ramifications that can lead to many fallacious conclusions, even if their verbal virtuosity conceals those fallacies from others and from themselves.

Sowell, Thomas (2012-03-06). Intellectuals and Society (Kindle Locations 1248-1256). Perseus Books Group. Kindle Edition.

Countries with generous minimum wage laws, for example, often have higher unemployment rates and longer periods of unemployment than other countries, as employers offer fewer jobs to inexperienced and low-skilled workers, who are typically the least valued and lowest paid—and who are most often priced out of a job by minimum wage laws.

Sowell, Thomas (2012-03-06). Intellectuals and Society (Kindle Locations 1259-1261). Perseus Books Group. Kindle Edition.

Chapter 5 — Government and the Economy

BUSINESS

Management

Intellectuals who have never run any business have often been remarkably confident that they know when businesses have been run wrongly or when their owners or managers are overpaid. . . .

Sowell, Thomas (2012-03-06). Intellectuals and Society (Kindle Locations 1346-1348). Perseus Books Group. Kindle Edition.

. . . As Theodore Roosevelt put it, in accepting the Progressive Party's nomination for President of the United States in 1912, "We stand at Armageddon, and we battle for the Lord." Business men were a special target: "Whenever in any business the prosperity of the business man is obtained by lowering the wages of his workmen and charging an excessive price to the consumers, we wish to interfere and stop such practices."

In other words, third party observers, usually without any business experience or (like TR) with no successful business experience, can somehow determine what prices are "excessive" and what wages are too low—and make their uninformed beliefs determine the law of the land.

Sowell, Thomas (2012-03-06). Intellectuals and Society (Kindle Locations 1395-1400). Perseus Books Group. Kindle Edition.

Business "Power" or "Control"

One of the many signs of verbal virtuosity among intellectuals is the repackaging of words to mean things that are not only different from, but sometimes the direct opposite of, their original meanings or the meaning that most other people attach to those words.

Sowell, Thomas (2012-03-06). Intellectuals and Society (Kindle Locations 1404-1405). Perseus Books Group. Kindle Edition.

. . . when consumers decide that particular brands of products are either cheaper or better than competing brands of those products, third parties take it upon themselves to depict those who produced these particular brands as having exercised "power" or "control." If, at a given time, three-quarters of the consumers prefer to buy the Acme brand of widgets to any other brand, then Acme Inc. will be said to "control" three-quarters of the market, even though consumers control 100 percent of the market, since they can switch to another brand of widgets tomorrow if someone else comes up with a better widget, or stop buying widgets altogether if a new product comes along that makes widgets obsolete.

Sowell, Thomas (2012-03-06). Intellectuals and Society (Kindle Locations 1411-1415). Perseus Books Group. Kindle Edition.

. . . By saying that businesses have "power" because they have "control" of their markets, this verbal virtuosity opens the way to saying that government needs to exercise its "countervailing power" (John Kenneth Galbraith's phrase) in order to protect the public. Despite the verbal parallels, government power is in fact power, since individuals do not have a free choice as to whether or not to obey government laws and regulations, while consumers are free to ignore the products marketed by even the biggest and supposedly most "powerful" corporations in the world.

Sowell, Thomas (2012-03-06). Intellectuals and Society (Kindle Locations 1423-1427). Perseus Books Group. Kindle Edition.

Henry Ford pioneered in mass production methods, and had some of the highest paid workers of his day—decades before the industry was unionized— and the lowest priced cars, notably the legendary Model T, which made the automobile no longer a luxury confined to the wealthy. But none of these plain facts prevailed against the vision of the Progressive era intelligentsia, who in this case included President Theodore Roosevelt. His administration launched anti-trust prosecutions against some of the biggest price-cutters, including Standard Oil and the Great Northern Railroad. Theodore Roosevelt sought the power, in his words, to “control and regulate all big combinations.” He declared that “of all forms of tyranny the least attractive and the most vulgar is the tyranny of mere wealth, the tyranny of a plutocracy.”

No doubt it was true, as TR said, that Standard Oil created “enormous fortunes” for its owners “at the expense of business rivals,” but it is questionable whether consumers who paid lower prices for oil felt that they were victims of a tyranny. One of the popular muckraking books of the Progressive era was *The History of the Standard Oil Company* by Ida Tarbell, which said among other things that Rockefeller “should have been satisfied” with what he had achieved financially by 1870, implying greed in his continued efforts to increase the size and profitability of Standard Oil.

A study done a century later, however, pointed out: “One might never know from reading *The History of Standard Oil* that oil prices were actually falling.” That fact had been filtered out of the story, as it has been filtered out of other stories of that time and of later times. The presumably key question whether Rockefeller’s pursuit of a larger fortune actually made the consuming public worse off was seldom even addressed. How consumers would have been better off if a man who introduced extraordinary efficiencies into the production and distribution of oil had ended his career earlier, leaving both the cost of producing oil and the resulting prices higher, is a question not raised, much less answered.

One of the common complaints against Standard Oil was that it was able to get railroads to charge them less for shipping their oil than was charged to competing businesses shipping oil. Such an inequality was of course anathema to those who thought in terms of abstract people in an abstract world—ignoring what there was specifically about Standard Oil that was different, which was the very reason why John D. Rockefeller amassed a fortune in an industry in which many others went bankrupt. For example, oil shipped in Standard Oil’s tank cars was easier to transport than oil shipped in barrels by other companies. Since the railroads had lower costs of handling Rockefeller’s oil, shipped in tank cars, than handling other producers’ oil shipped in barrels, Rockefeller paid less for shipping his oil.

There was nothing mysterious, much less sinister, about this. Yet Theodore Roosevelt—who knew little or no economics and had lost a large portion of his inheritance in his one business venture—said that discount shipping rates were discriminatory and should be forbidden “in every shape and form.” Senator John Sherman, author of the Sherman Anti-Trust Act, also introduced legislation to ban differential shipping rates, apparently at the prompting of a refinery that shipped its oil in barrels. Today, oil is still *measured* in barrels but it is *shipped* in tanker cars on railroads, in tanker trucks on land and in ocean-going oil tankers, as the whole industry now follows methods pioneered by John D. Rockefeller.

Sowell, Thomas (2012-03-06). Intellectuals and Society (Kindle Locations 1460-1489). Perseus Books Group. Kindle Edition.

RECESSIONS AND DEPRESSIONS

Nothing established the idea that government intervention in the economy is essential like the Great Depression of the 1930s. The raw facts tell the story of that historic tragedy: National output fell by one-third between 1929 and 1933, thousands of banks failed, unemployment peaked at 25 percent,

and the entire corporate sector as a whole lost money, two years in a row, at the depth of the Great Depression.

Prior to that time, no president had attempted to have the federal government intervene to bring a depression to an end. Many at the time saw in the Great Depression the failure of free market capitalism as an economic system, and a reason for seeking a radically different kind of economy—for some Communism, for some Fascism and for some the New Deal policies of Franklin D. Roosevelt's administration. Whatever the particular alternative favored by particular individuals, what was widely believed then and later was that the stock market crash of 1929 was not only a failure of the free market but the cause of the massive unemployment that persisted for years during the 1930s.

Given the two most striking events of that era—the huge stock market crash and a widespread government intervention in the economy—it is not immediately obvious which of these was more responsible for the dire economic conditions that followed. But remarkably little effort has been made by most of the intelligentsia to try to distinguish the effects of one of these events from the effects of the other. It has been largely a foregone conclusion that the market was the cause and that government intervention was the saving grace. Yet it is hard to maintain that conclusion after following the specific sequence of events.

Both at the time and since then, many or most of the intelligentsia have assumed that there had to be government intervention in a depression where mass unemployment reached as high as 25 percent at its worst. But unemployment never reached 25 percent until *after* massive government intervention. Unemployment never reached double digits during any of the 12 months that followed the stock market crash of 1929. When the first major federal government intervention was made in June 1930, the unemployment rate was 6.3 percent—down from a peak of 9 percent two months after the stock market crash of October 1929.²⁹ It was only after this intervention—the Smoot-Hawley tariffs of 1930—that the downward movement in unemployment reversed and rose within six months to double digits.

In the wake of this government intervention under President Herbert Hoover, followed by new and more sweeping interventions under President Franklin D. Roosevelt, unemployment remained in double digits for the entire remainder of the decade. In short, the brief (one-month) 9 percent unemployment rate in the wake of the stock market crash of 1929 was dwarfed by later unemployment rates that soared after government interventions under both Hoover and FDR. The unemployment rate never fell below 20 percent for any month over a period of 35 consecutive months, from the Hoover administration into the Roosevelt administration. Moreover, even after the unemployment rate eventually fell below 20 percent, it rose again to 20 percent in the spring of 1939, nearly a decade after the stock market crash that has been widely blamed for the mass unemployment of the 1930s.

Presidents Hoover and FDR were not the only sources of federal intervention. One of the few things on which people across the ideological spectrum agreed upon in later years was that the Federal Reserve System mishandled its job during the Great Depression. Looking back at that period, Milton Friedman called the people who ran the Federal Reserve “inept” and John Kenneth Galbraith said that Federal Reserve officials showed “startling incompetence.” For example, as the country's money supply declined by one-third in the wake of massive bank failures, the Federal Reserve raised the interest rate, creating further deflationary pressures.

Congress also passed laws more than doubling the tax rates on the upper income brackets under Hoover and raised them still higher under FDR. President Hoover urged business leaders not to reduce workers' wage rates during the depression, even though the greatly reduced money supply made the previous wage-rates unpayable with full employment. Both Hoover and his successor, FDR, sought to keep prices from falling, whether the price of labor, farm produce, or industrial output, assuming that this would keep purchasing power from falling. However, purchasing power depends not only on what

prices are charged but on how many transactions will actually be made at those prices. With a reduced money supply, neither the previous amount of employment of labor nor the previous sales of farm or industrial products could continue at the old prices.

Neither Hoover nor FDR seemed to understand this nor to have thought this far. However, columnist Walter Lippmann pointed out the obvious in 1934 when he said, "in a depression men cannot sell their goods or their service at pre-depression prices. If they insist on pre-depression prices for goods, they do not sell them. If they insist on pre-depression wages, they become unemployed." Though neither the sellers nor the unemployed workers were demanding prices or wages that were unsustainable under depression conditions, with a greatly reduced money supply, the federal government was doing just that by mandating prices and wages that made both goods and labor unsalable, through the National Industrial Recovery Act, the Agricultural Adjustment Act, the Fair Labor Standards Act and other legislation and policies.

There is little empirical evidence to suggest that the many government interventions during the 1930s helped the economy and much evidence to suggest that they made matters worse. A 2004 study by economists in a leading scholarly journal concluded that government policies prolonged the Great Depression by several years.

There is of course no way to re-run the stock market crash of 1929 and have the federal government let the market adjust on its own, in order to see how that experiment would turn out. The closest thing to such an experiment was the 1987 stock market crash, when stock prices fell further in one day than on any day in 1929. The Reagan administration did nothing, despite outrage in the media at the government's failure to act.

"What will it take to wake up the White House?" the *New York Times* asked, declaring that "the President abdicates leadership and courts disaster." *Washington Post* columnist Mary McGrory said that Reagan "has been singularly indifferent" to the country's "current pain and confusion." The *Financial Times* of London said that President Reagan "appears to lack the capacity to handle adversity" and "nobody seems to be in charge." A former official of the Carter administration criticized President Reagan's "silence and inaction" following the 1987 stock market crash and compared him unfavorably to President Franklin D. Roosevelt, whose "personal style and bold commands would be a tonic" in the current crisis.

The irony in this comparison was that FDR presided over an economy with seven consecutive years of double-digit unemployment, while Reagan's policy of letting the market recover on its own, far from leading to another Great Depression, led instead to one of the country's longest periods of sustained economic growth, low unemployment and low inflation, lasting twenty years.

Sowell, Thomas (2012-03-06). Intellectuals and Society (Kindle Locations 1509-1567). Perseus Books Group. Kindle Edition.

PART III — INTELLECTUALS AND SOCIAL VISIONS

Chapter 6 — A Conflict of Visions

OPPOSING SOCIAL VISIONS

At the heart of the social vision prevalent among contemporary intellectuals is the belief that there are “problems” created by existing institutions and that “solutions” to these problems can be excogitated by intellectuals. This vision is both a vision of society and a vision of the role of intellectuals within society. In short, intellectuals have seen themselves not simply as an elite—in the passive sense in which large landowners, renters, or holders of various sinecures might qualify as elites—but as an **anointed** elite, people with a mission to lead others in one way or another toward better lives.

Sowell, Thomas (2012-03-06). Intellectuals and Society (Kindle Locations 1594-1598). Perseus Books Group. Kindle Edition.

. . . In short, the ills of society have been seen as ultimately an intellectual and moral problem, for which intellectuals are especially equipped to provide answers, by virtue of their greater knowledge and insight, as well as their not having vested economic interests to bias them in favor of the existing order and still the voice of conscience.

Sowell, Thomas (2012-03-06). Intellectuals and Society (Kindle Locations 1608-1611). Perseus Books Group. Kindle Edition.

If you happen to believe in free markets, judicial restraint, traditional values and other features of the tragic vision, then you are just someone who believes in free markets, judicial restraint and traditional values. There is no personal exaltation inherent in those beliefs. But to be for “social justice” and “saving the environment,” or to be “anti-war” is more than just a set of hypotheses about empirical facts. This vision puts you on a higher moral plane as someone concerned and compassionate, someone who is for peace in the world, a defender of the downtrodden, and someone who wants to preserve the beauty of nature and save the planet from being polluted by others less caring.

Sowell, Thomas (2012-03-06). Intellectuals and Society (Kindle Locations 1670-1675). Perseus Books Group. Kindle Edition.

THE LEFT-RIGHT DICHOTOMY

. . . It should be noted also that neither “liberal” nor “conservative,” as those terms are used in the American context, has much relationship to their original meanings. Milton Friedman, one of the leading American “conservative” intellectuals of his time, advocated radical changes in the country’s school system, in the role of the Federal Reserve System, and in the economy in general. One of his books was titled **The Tyranny of the Status Quo**. He, like Friedrich Hayek, called himself a “liberal” in the original sense of the word, but that sense has been irretrievably lost in general discussions in the United States, though people with similar views are still called liberals in some other countries.

Despite all this, even scholarly studies of intellectuals have referred to Hayek as a defender of the “status quo,” and as one of those whose “defense of the existing state of affairs” has “furnished justifications for the powers that be.” Whatever the merits or demerits of Hayek’s ideas, those ideas were far more distant from the status quo than were the ideas of those who criticized him. In general,

people such as Hayek, who are referred to in the American context as “conservatives,” have a set of ideas which differ not only in degree, but in kind, from the ideas of many others who are said to be on the right politically. Perhaps if liberals were simply called *X* and conservatives were called *Y* there would be less confusion.

Sowell, Thomas (2012-03-06). Intellectuals and Society (Kindle Locations 1735-1746). Perseus Books Group. Kindle Edition.

In market economies . . . consumers and producers make their own decisions individually and the social consequences are determined by the effect of those individual decisions on the way resources are allocated in the economy as a whole, in response to the movements of prices and incomes—which in turn respond to supply and demand. While this vision of the economy is often considered to be “conservative” (in the original sense of the word), in the long view of the history of ideas it has been revolutionary. From ancient times to the present, and in highly disparate societies around the world, there have been the most varied systems of thought—both secular and religious—seeking to determine how best the wise and virtuous can influence or direct the masses, in order to create or maintain a happier, more viable or more worthy society. In this context, it was a revolutionary departure when, in eighteenth-century France, the Physiocrats arose to proclaim that, for the economy at least, the best that the reigning authorities could do would be to leave it alone—laissez-faire being the term they coined. To those with this vision, whether in France or elsewhere, for the authorities to impose economic policies would be to give “a most unnecessary attention,” in Adam Smith’s words, to a spontaneous system of interactions that would go better without government intervention—not perfectly, just better.

Sowell, Thomas (2012-03-06). Intellectuals and Society (Kindle Locations 1757-1768). Perseus Books Group. Kindle Edition.

. . . the vision of the left is one of surrogate decision-making by those presumed to have not only superior knowledge but sufficient knowledge, whether these surrogates are political leaders, experts, judges or others. This is the vision that is common to varying degrees on the political left, whether radical or moderate, and common also to totalitarians, whether Communist or Fascist.

. . . The free market, for example, is a huge exemption from government power. In such a market, there is no commonality of purpose, except among such individuals and organizations as may choose voluntarily to coalesce into groups ranging from bowling leagues to multinational corporations. But even these aggregations typically pursue the interests of their own respective constituents and compete against the interests of other aggregations. Those who advocate this mode of social decision-making do so because they believe that the systemic results of such competition are usually better than a society-wide commonality of purpose imposed by surrogate decision-makers superintending the whole process in the name of “the national interest” or of “social justice.”

Sowell, Thomas (2012-03-06). Intellectuals and Society (Kindle Locations 1780-1791). Perseus Books Group. Kindle Edition.

. . . the left seldom has any explicit principle by which the boundaries between government and individual decision-making can be determined, so that the natural tendency over time is for the scope of government decision-making to expand, as more and more decisions are taken successively from private hands, since government officials constantly have incentives to expand their powers while the voters’ attention is not constantly focused on maintaining limits on those powers.

Sowell, Thomas (2012-03-06). Intellectuals and Society (Kindle Locations 1796-1799). Perseus Books Group. Kindle Edition.

YOUTH AND AGE

The 1960s notion that “we should learn from our young people” had antecedents going back to the eighteenth century. Such subsidiary social phenomena as lowering the voting age, and reducing the deference to the older generation in general and to parents in particular, are likewise very consistent with, if not inescapable corollaries from, the over-all conception of knowledge and intelligence prevalent among those with the vision of the anointed. Where social problems are seen as being consequences of existing institutions and prejudices, the young are often seen as less wedded to the status quo, and thus as hopes for the future.

Sowell, Thomas (2012-03-06). Intellectuals and Society (Kindle Locations 1865-1869). Perseus Books Group. Kindle Edition.

. . . The education of the young has long been a battleground between adherents of the two visions of the nature of human beings and the nature of knowledge and wisdom. William Godwin’s notion that the young “are a sort of raw material put into our hands” remains, after two centuries, a powerful temptation to classroom indoctrination in schools and colleges. In the early twentieth century, Woodrow Wilson wrote of his years as an academic administrator when he felt “I should like to make the young gentlemen of the rising generation as unlike their fathers as possible.”

This indoctrination can start as early as elementary school, where students are encouraged or required to write about controversial issues, sometimes in letters to public officials. More fundamentally, the indoctrination process habituates them to taking sides on weighty and complex issues after hearing just one side of those issues. Moreover, they are habituated to venting their emotions instead of analyzing conflicting evidence and dissecting conflicting arguments. In short, they are led to prepackaged conclusions, instead of being equipped with the intellectual tools to reach their own conclusions, including conclusions different from those of their teachers. In many colleges and universities, whole academic departments are devoted to particular prepackaged conclusions—whether on race, the environment or other subjects, under such names as black, women’s or environmental “studies.” Few, if any, of these “studies” include conflicting visions and conflicting evidence, as educational rather than ideological criteria might require.

Sowell, Thomas (2012-03-06). Intellectuals and Society (Kindle Locations 1887-1899). Perseus Books Group. Kindle Edition.

One of the remarkable self-indulgences of contemporary educators in the public schools has been the introduction into classrooms of programs which systematically undermine moral principles that have come down over the centuries, and which children have been taught by their parents. These programs have usually been developed by intellectuals outside the field of education, extensively marketed by both commercial firms and non-profit organizations, and are often eagerly embraced by educators who have been taught in schools of education that their role is to be that of agents of social “change,” not simply transmitters of a heritage of knowledge. These programs have a remarkable variety of names and ostensible goals, one of the earliest names being “values clarification,” though other names have proliferated after parents and others discovered what “values clarification” really meant in practice and raised objections. The phrase “values clarification” is very misleading. When parents tell their children not to steal or lie, or engage in violence, there is no ambiguity as to what they mean. Ambiguity is introduced by programs which confront students with carefully crafted moral dilemmas, such as a situation where a ship is sinking and there are more people than the lifeboats can hold, so that decisions have to be made as to who is to be left to drown, perhaps beaten off when they try to climb out of the water onto a lifeboat that is already so full that it will capsize if another person climbs in. Because received moral principles do not always apply, the implication is that each individual should develop his or her own situational ethics to replace traditional morality—not only where traditional moral principles

fail but in the vast range of more ordinary situations where there are no such dilemmas as those in contrived examples.

If such exercises seem remote from the purposes of a public school education, they are not remote from the philosophy introduced into education by John Dewey a century ago and promoted by schools of education to the present day. Nor were they remote from the thinking by Woodrow Wilson. . . .

Sowell, Thomas (2012-03-06). Intellectuals and Society (Kindle Locations 1910-1925). Perseus Books Group. Kindle Edition.

“Values clarification” has been just one of a wide range of high-sounding names for classroom programs to re-shape the attitudes and consciousness of the younger generation. Other names have included “affective education,” “decision-making,” “Quest,” “sex education” and many other imaginative titles. Such titles are often simply flags of convenience, under which schools set sail on an “exciting” voyage in an uncharted sea of social experimentation in the re-shaping of young people’s beliefs and attitudes. The ever-changing names for these programs reflect the need for concealment or misdirection, since few parents want to be told that schools are out to undo what the parents have taught their children or to mold those children to be what third parties want them to be.

Sowell, Thomas (2012-03-06). Intellectuals and Society (Kindle Locations 1928-1933). Perseus Books Group. Kindle Edition.

Writing in the early twentieth century, however, Dewey’s notion that education should be a means to “eliminate obvious social evils” through its “development of children and youth but also of the future society of which they will be the constituents” was a fundamental change in the role of schools. The notion that the school should be run as a microcosm of society—“a miniature community, an embryonic society”—and as a place for conditioning students to want a very different kind of society, unlike the current society, was not something likely to find approval or perhaps even toleration. In the early twentieth century especially, parents were not sending their children to school to become guinea pigs in someone else’s social experiments to use education as a means of subverting existing values in order to create a new society based on new values, those of a self-anointed elite, more or less behind the backs of parents, voters and taxpayers.

Sowell, Thomas (2012-03-06). Intellectuals and Society (Kindle Locations 1947-1954). Perseus Books Group. Kindle Edition.

Chapter 7 — Abstract People in an Abstract World

One of the bases for many of the intellectuals' sweeping pronouncements about whole societies is conceiving of people in the abstract, without the innumerable specific, systematic and consequential **differences** in characteristics found among flesh-and-blood human beings as they exist in the real world. . . .

Sowell, Thomas (2012-03-06). Intellectuals and Society (Kindle Locations 1956-1958). Perseus Books Group. Kindle Edition.

Abstract people are very convenient for intellectuals' discussions or research. Abstract people can be aggregated into statistical categories such as households, families, and income brackets, without the slightest concern for whether those statistical categories contain similar people, or even the same numbers of people, or people who differ substantially in age, much less in such finer distinctions as whether or not they are working or whether they are the same people in the same categories over time. The gross contrast between the impression created by income data from the Census Bureau and income data from the Internal Revenue Service, as noted in Chapter 3, is due essentially to the Census' data being about unspecified people in abstract brackets over time, and the IRS data being compiled from identifiable flesh-and-blood individuals as they move massively from one bracket to another over time.

Thinking of people in the abstract, and dismissing observed differences between them as mere "perceptions," or "stereotypes" provides the intelligentsia with innumerable occasions for waxing morally indignant at the concrete differences in economic and other outcomes among different individuals and groups as they exist in the real world. Reluctance to associate with any group, whether at work or in neighborhood or other settings, is almost automatically attributed by the intelligentsia to ignorance, prejudice or malice—in utter disregard of not only the first-hand experience of those who are reluctant, but also of objective data on vast differences in rates of crime, alcoholism, and substandard school performances between groups, even though such differences have been common in countries around the world for centuries.

Sowell, Thomas (2012-03-06). Intellectuals and Society (Kindle Locations 1960-1972). Perseus Books Group. Kindle Edition.

Considering an opposite approach may make the difference between reasoning in the abstract and reasoning in the concrete stand out more sharply. When a scholarly study of economic development in Latin America concluded, "Costa Rica is different from Nicaragua **because Costa Ricans are different from Nicaraguans,**" its conclusion—whatever its merits or demerits—was one almost unthinkable within the confines of the vision of the anointed, even as a hypothesis to be tested. The opposite approach—treating Costa Ricans and Nicaraguans as if they were abstract people in an abstract world, whose differences in outcomes could only be a result of external circumstances, has been far more common among the intelligentsia.

Sowell, Thomas (2012-03-06). Intellectuals and Society (Kindle Locations 1989-1994). Perseus Books Group. Kindle Edition.

DISPARITIES AND THEIR CAUSES

In the nineteenth century, Scottish highlanders were not as prosperous as Scottish lowlanders, whether in Scotland itself or as immigrants living in Australia or the United States. In the twentieth century, Gaelic-speaking children in the Hebrides Islands off Scotland did not score as high on IQ tests as the English-speaking children there. Rates of alcoholism among Irish-Americans have at one time been some multiple of the rates of alcoholism among Italian Americans or Jewish Americans. In the days of the Soviet Union, the consumption of cognac in Estonia was more than seven times what it was in

Uzbekistan. In Malaysia during the 1960s, students from the Chinese minority earned more than 400 degrees in engineering, while students from the Malay majority earned just four degrees during that same decade.

To those who think in terms of abstract people in an abstract world, it may be surprising, or even shocking, to discover large intergroup disparities in incomes, I.Q.s and numerous other social variables. Although such disparities are common in many very different societies around the world, intellectuals in each society tend to regard these disparities in their own country as strange, if not sinister. In some countries, particular minorities have been accused of “taking over” whole industries, when in fact those industries did not exist until those minorities created them.

Sowell, Thomas (2012-03-06). Intellectuals and Society (Kindle Locations 2000-2012). Perseus Books Group. Kindle Edition.

. . . The Mayans had invented wheels, but they were used on children’s toys, . . .

Sowell, Thomas (2012-03-06). Intellectuals and Society (Kindle Locations 2070-2071). Perseus Books Group. Kindle Edition.

. . . cultures—whole ways of life—do not simply evaporate when conditions change, whether among Africans or others. Long-standing and deep-seated cultural differences can become cultural barriers, even after the geographical barriers that created cultural isolation have been overcome with the growth of modern transportation and communication. As distinguished cultural historian Oscar Handlin put it: “men are not blank tablets upon which the environment inscribes a culture which can readily be erased to make way for a new inscription.” As another noted historian put it: “We do not live in the past, but the past in us.”

Sowell, Thomas (2012-03-06). Intellectuals and Society (Kindle Locations 2095-2100). Perseus Books Group. Kindle Edition.

The views of those who reason as if discussing abstract people in an abstract world were exemplified in the dissenting opinion of Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg in the 2011 U.S. Supreme Court case of **Wal-Mart v. Dukes**. Justice Ginsburg objected to Wal-Mart’s “system of delegated discretion” in which individual managers in its stores across the country assess the job performances of the individuals working under them, and determine pay and promotions accordingly. This can lead to “discriminatory outcomes,” she said, due to “arbitrary and subjective criteria.”

While discrimination can certainly affect outcomes, it does not follow that outcomes tell you whether or not there is discrimination. To believe the latter would be to say that those whose managerial decisions **convey** differences among groups are the **cause** of those differences among groups—that the groups themselves cannot possibly behave or perform differently. Moreover, to say that judgments made by those directly observing the behavior or performances of individuals are “subjective” is to imply that “objective” standards prescribed by distant third parties who have never laid eyes on the individuals involved would be more accurate.

Sowell, Thomas (2012-03-06). Intellectuals and Society (Kindle Locations 2153-2162). Perseus Books Group. Kindle Edition.

INTERTEMPORAL ABSTRACTIONS

Abstract people have an immortality which flesh-and-blood people have yet to achieve. Thus, a historian writing about the newly-created state of Czechoslovakia after the First World War, said that its policies regarding the ethnic groups within it were designed “to correct social injustice” and to “put right the historic wrongs of the seventeenth century”—despite the fact that actual flesh-and-blood people from the seventeenth century had died long before, putting the redressing of their wrongs beyond the reach of human power.

Sowell, Thomas (2012-03-06). Intellectuals and Society (Kindle Locations 2176-2180). Perseus Books Group. Kindle Edition.

Unlike real people, abstract people can be sent “back” to places where they have never been. Thus millions of descendants of German families who had lived for centuries in parts of Eastern Europe and the Balkans were sent “back” to Germany after the Second World War, as the majority populations of these regions reacted bitterly to having been mistreated during Nazi occupation by imposing a massive ethnic cleansing of Germans from their midst after the war. Many of these flesh-and-blood individuals of German ancestry had never laid eyes on Germany, to which they were being sent “back.” Only as intertemporal abstractions had they come from Germany.

Sowell, Thomas (2012-03-06). Intellectuals and Society (Kindle Locations 2184-2189). Perseus Books Group. Kindle Edition.

EQUALITY

. . . Abstract potential carries very little weight anywhere in the real world, when people are making decisions for themselves. Performance is what counts. What we want to know is what real people can actually do, not what abstract potential there is in abstract people.

Sowell, Thomas (2012-03-06). Intellectuals and Society (Kindle Locations 2241-2242). Perseus Books Group. Kindle Edition.

. . . when black and white Americans in the same income brackets were turned down for mortgage loans at different rates, that was enough for editorials in **USA Today** and in the **St. Louis Post-Dispatch**, among others, to conclude that this was due to racial discrimination, and for a front-page news story in the **New York Times** to imply as much. But that ignores other economic variables affecting the acceptance or rejection of mortgage loan applications, such as credit scores, which are different on average between blacks and whites.

What most media accounts have also left out is that Asian Americans had higher average credit scores than those of whites, which in turn were higher than those of blacks. In 2000, when blacks were turned down for conventional mortgage loans at double the rate for whites, the whites were in turn denied conventional mortgage loans at nearly double the rate for Asian Americans. But including Asian Americans in these comparisons would have undermined the racial discrimination theory. So would inclusion of the fact that banks owned by blacks also turned down black applicants—at a rate higher than the rejection rates of black applicants by white-owned banks. All of these real world differences were avoided by reasoning as if discussing abstract people whose differences in outcomes could only be due to mistaken or malign decisions made by others.

Sowell, Thomas (2012-03-06). Intellectuals and Society (Kindle Locations 2264-2275). Perseus Books Group. Kindle Edition.

The point here is that all these very different notions are encompassed by the undefined word “equality.” Abstract people may have equality in all these senses simultaneously, but that is very different from saying that the same is true of flesh-and-blood human beings in the real world.

Similar principles are involved when discussing differences between the sexes, as well as differences among races or other subdivisions of the human species. The fact that the widest income differences between the sexes are between men with children and women with children is hardly surprising, when recognizing the mundane fact that how those children are produced and raised differs radically between mothers and fathers, however much fathers and mothers can be made verbally equivalent as parents when discussing people in the abstract.

Empirical data suggest that being a mother increases the importance of a particular job’s working conditions relative to the importance of its pay—especially when some higher paid occupations require very long hours of work, including unpredictable demands to work nights and weekends, or to fly off to other cities or countries on short notice for indefinite amounts of time, as high-powered lawyers or

executives may have to do. But to be a father with a family to support can have the opposite effect of being a mother, making higher pay more important to fathers than to single men, childless husbands or to women—all of whom have lower incomes than fathers—even if that means taking jobs whose working conditions are not particularly desirable or even as safe as most jobs. More than 90 percent of job-related deaths occur among men, for example. Given their respective incentives and constraints, the fact that parenthood has opposite effects on the incomes of women and men is by no means mysterious.

Sowell, Thomas (2012-03-06). Intellectuals and Society (Kindle Locations 2310-2324). Perseus Books Group. Kindle Edition.

Where women and men are truly comparable—for example, when they are older than the usual child-bearing years and both have worked continuously and full-time in the same occupations—various studies have found the women making the same incomes as the men, or more than the men.

Sowell, Thomas (2012-03-06). Intellectuals and Society (Kindle Locations 2331-2333). Perseus Books Group. Kindle Edition.

With both the sexes and the races, empirical evidence may not only be mishandled but even deemed unnecessary, as exemplified in the phrase “glass ceiling” as an explanation for the under-representation of women in higher levels of employment. Defined as an “invisible but impenetrable barrier between women and the executive suite,” the term “glass ceiling” implies that even in the absence of any tangible empirical evidence of that barrier—since it is “invisible”—we are to accept its existence, much as people in a well-known fable were to accept the emperor’s new clothes. In other words, the whole question of the existence or effect of the posited barrier is taken out of the realm of empirical evidence. Such verbal virtuosity simply preempts the question as to whether there is an internal reason or an external obstruction that explains the differential advancement of women to higher management positions.

Where that question is not finessed aside by sheer assertion, however, the evidence against the external barrier theory is considerable. For example, Diana Furchtgott-Roth has pointed out that the “top corporate jobs require one to be in the pipeline for at least 25 years” and that “less than 5 percent of the qualified candidates for these jobs were women.”

Sowell, Thomas (2012-03-06). Intellectuals and Society (Kindle Locations 2341-2350). Perseus Books Group. Kindle Edition.

Chapter 8 — Argument Without Arguments

UNWORTHY OPPONENTS

. . . A contemporary account has noted:

Disagree with someone on the right and he is likely to think you obtuse, wrong, foolish, a dope. Disagree with someone on the left and he is more likely to think you selfish, a sell-out, insensitive, possibly evil.

Supporters of both visions, by definition, believe that those with the opposing vision are mistaken. But that is not enough for those with the vision of the anointed. It has long been taken for granted by those with the vision of the anointed that their opponents are lacking in compassion. . . .

Sowell, Thomas (2012-03-06). Intellectuals and Society (Kindle Locations 2437-2441). Perseus Books Group. Kindle Edition.

. . . Those with the vision of the anointed have far more often, and for a very long time, seen such differences as signs of internal defects in those who disagree with them. . . .

Sowell, Thomas (2012-03-06). Intellectuals and Society (Kindle Locations 2505-2506). Perseus Books Group. Kindle Edition.

THE RHETORIC OF "RIGHTS"

Much advocacy by intellectuals involve assertions of “rights,” for which no basis is asked or given. Neither constitutional provisions, legislative enactments, contractual obligations, nor international treaties are cited as bases for these “rights.” Thus there are said to be “rights” to “a living wage,” “decent housing,” “affordable health care,” and numerous other benefits, material and psychic. That such things may be desirable is not the issue. The real issue is why such things are regarded as obligations—the logical corollary of rights—upon other people who have agreed to no such obligation to provide these things. If someone has a right, someone else has an obligation. But the proposed right to a “living wage,” for example, is not based on any obligation agreed to by an employer. On the contrary, this “right” is cited as a reason why government should force the employer to pay what third parties would like to see paid.

“Rights,” as the term is used ideologically, imply no mutual agreement of any kind, whether among individuals, enterprises or nations. Captured terrorists, for example, have been deemed by some to have a right to the same treatment prescribed for prisoners of war by the Geneva Convention, even though terrorists have neither agreed to the terms of the Geneva Convention nor are among those whom the signers of that convention designated as covered by the convention. Again, “rights,” as the term is used ideologically, are ultimately assertions of arbitrary authority by third parties to prescribe things that others have never agreed to.

The same principle is expressed when terms like “social responsibility” or “social contract” are used to describe what third parties want done, regardless of whether any others have agreed to do it. Thus business is said to have a “social responsibility” to provide various benefits to various individuals or to society at large, regardless of whether or not those businesses have chosen to assume such a responsibility. Nor are these responsibilities necessarily based on laws that have been enacted. On the contrary, the asserted “responsibilities” are the basis for advocating the passing of such laws, even though the responsibilities have no basis themselves, other than the fact that third parties want them imposed.

Sowell, Thomas (2012-03-06). Intellectuals and Society (Kindle Locations 2715-2731). Perseus Books Group. Kindle Edition.

. . . Social Security has been described as a “contract between the generations” when, obviously, generations yet unborn could not have agreed to any such contract.

Sowell, Thomas (2012-03-06). Intellectuals and Society (Kindle Locations 2735-2736). Perseus Books Group. Kindle Edition.

"SOCIAL JUSTICE"

Among the many arguments without arguments, none is more pervasive or more powerful than that of what is called “social justice.” Yet it is a term with no real definition, even though it is a term that has been in use for more than a century. All justice is inherently social, since someone alone on a desert island cannot be either just or unjust. What seems to be implied by adding the word “social” to the concept of justice is that justice is to be established among groups, rather than just among individuals. But this collectivizing of justice does little to make the concept of social justice any clearer. . . .

Sowell, Thomas (2012-03-06). Intellectuals and Society (Kindle Locations 2758-2762). Perseus Books Group. Kindle Edition.

. . . In {Edmund} Burke’s words, “all men have equal rights; but not to equal things.” Alexander Hamilton likewise considered “all men” to be “entitled to a parity of privileges,” though he expected that economic inequality “would exist as long as liberty existed.”

Sowell, Thomas (2012-03-06). Intellectuals and Society (Kindle Locations 2767-2770). Perseus Books Group. Kindle Edition.

Like many others who argue in terms of life chances, Rawls assumes in passing that these differences in life chances are externally “imposed”—presumably by society—rather than being internally produced differences, due to individual or group behavior patterns that are less successful in educational institutions and in the economy, for example. The correlation between family income and subsequent individual educational achievement tells us nothing about the nature, or even the direction, of causation. Low income might lead to low educational achievements, or both might be results of a set of attitudes, behavior or capabilities among the less successful individuals or groups.

Similarly, Professor Peter Corning’s observation that “the children of affluent parents have a far better than average chance of doing well economically, whereas the offspring of the poor generally do much worse than average,” tells us nothing about whether the reasons are external or internal. Statisticians have often warned against confusing correlation with causation, a warning all too often ignored.

Sowell, Thomas (2012-03-06). Intellectuals and Society (Kindle Locations 2809-2817). Perseus Books Group. Kindle Edition.

To ask whether life chances are equal or fair is to ask a very **different** question from asking whether a particular institution or a particular society treats individuals equally or fairly, though these two very different questions are often confused with one another.

To take a small and simple example, various mental tests or scholastic tests have been criticized as unfair because different groups perform very differently on such tests. But one reply to critics summarized the issue succinctly: “The tests are not unfair. **Life** is unfair and the tests measure the results.” Here, as in economic and other contexts, there is a fundamental distinction between **conveying** a difference that already exists and **causing** a difference to exist.

Abandoning these tests would not make life any fairer. Those who lag in mental development or academic skills, for whatever reason, would still lag. If tests were no longer conveying these deficiencies beforehand, then performances on the job or in educational institutions would reveal the deficiencies

later. It is doing no favor to those who lag to postpone the revelation of those lags. On the contrary, the earlier the lags are discovered, the greater the chances of their being overcome.

Sowell, Thomas (2012-03-06). Intellectuals and Society (Kindle Locations 2873-2883). Perseus Books Group. Kindle Edition.

Life chances have seldom, if ever, been even approximately equal in any society. Yet many with the vision of social justice attribute unequal or unfair outcomes to the defects of “our society,” and imagine that they are able not only to conceive, but to create, a different society that will achieve what innumerable other societies of the past and present have not even come close to achieving. . . .

Sowell, Thomas (2012-03-06). Intellectuals and Society (Kindle Locations 2884-2886). Perseus Books Group. Kindle Edition.

Even in an open society where one can literally go from rags to riches, how many people are even oriented toward doing that, much less equipped with the attitudes and self-discipline that are as essential as ability, is often dependent on the family and community in which they were raised, or on a chance encounter with someone who helped set them on the path to personal achievement—or to ruin. There are things societies can do to mitigate the inherent unfairness of life. But there are also limits to what society can do. No society can change the past—and, as a noted historian once said, “We do not live in the past, but the past in us.”

To suggest that “society” can simply “arrange” better outcomes somehow, without specifying the processes, the costs or the risks, is to ignore the tragic history of the twentieth century, written in the blood of millions, killed in peacetime by their own governments that were given extraordinary powers in the name of lofty goals.

Sowell, Thomas (2012-03-06). Intellectuals and Society (Kindle Locations 2890-2897). Perseus Books Group. Kindle Edition.

. . . the rights of individuals cannot take precedence over the preservation of society, for the individual would not even survive physically without society, and the very concept of the rights of individuals comes from society. Where society breaks down and anarchy reigns, it can quickly become painfully clear how little the rights of individuals matter without a functioning society to enforce them.

Sowell, Thomas (2012-03-06). Intellectuals and Society (Kindle Locations 2929-2931). Perseus Books Group. Kindle Edition.

Chapter 9 — Patterns of the Anointed

"CHANGE" VERSUS THE STATUS QUO

The very concept of change used by the intelligentsia of the left—which is to say, most of the intelligentsia—is arbitrarily restrictive and tendentious. It means in practice the particular kinds of changes, through the particular kinds of social mechanisms that they envision. Other changes—no matter how large or how consequential for the lives of millions of people—tend to be ignored if they occur through other mechanisms and in ways not contemplated by the intelligentsia. At the very least, such unprescribed developments outside the scope of the vision of the anointed are denied the honorific title of “change.”

The 1920s, for example, were a decade of huge changes in the lives of the people of the United States: the change from a predominantly rural to a predominantly urban society, the spread of electricity, automobiles, and radios to vastly more millions of Americans, the beginning of commercial air travel, the revolutionizing of retail selling, with resulting lower prices, by the rapid spread of nationwide chain stores that made more products more affordable to more people. Yet when intellectuals refer to eras of “change,” they almost never mention the 1920s—because these sweeping changes in the way millions of Americans lived their lives were not the particular kinds of changes envisioned by the intelligentsia, through the particular kinds of social mechanisms envisioned by the intelligentsia. In the eyes of much of the intelligentsia, the 1920s (when that decade is thought of at all) are seen as a period of a stagnant status quo, presided over by conservative administrations opposed to “change.”

Sowell, Thomas (2012-03-06). Intellectuals and Society (Kindle Locations 3017-3028). Perseus Books Group. Kindle Edition.

ATTITUDES VERSUS PRINCIPLES

. . . intellectuals who are receptive to claims of mitigation on the part of murderers who profess to have been battered wives, or others who are said to have had traumatic childhoods of one sort or another, or the less fortunate in general, are seldom receptive to claims that policemen who had a split second to make a life-and-death shooting decision, at the risk of their own lives, should be cut some slack.

Sowell, Thomas (2012-03-06). Intellectuals and Society (Kindle Locations 3034-3037). Perseus Books Group. Kindle Edition.

Many among the intelligentsia have denounced “greed” among corporate executives whose incomes are a fraction of the incomes of professional athletes or entertainers who are seldom, if ever, accused of greed.

The intelligentsia have led outraged outcries against oil companies’ profits when gasoline prices have risen, though the amount of profits in the price of a gallon of gasoline is much less than the amount of taxes. But the concept of “greed” is almost never applied to government, whether in the amount of taxes it collects or even when working class homes, often representing the labors and sacrifices of a lifetime, are confiscated wholesale for “redevelopment” of an area in ways that will bring in more taxes to the local jurisdiction (at the expense of other jurisdictions), thereby enabling local politicians to do more spending to enhance their chances of being reelected. It is not uncommon among the intelligentsia to consider it “selfish” if you object to others taxing away what you have earned, but it is not considered selfish for politicians to want to tax away any amount of the earnings, not only of contemporaries, but also of generations yet unborn, to whom the national debt will be passed on.

Sowell, Thomas (2012-03-06). Intellectuals and Society (Kindle Locations 3042-3051). Perseus Books Group. Kindle Edition.

CRUSADES OF THE ANOINTED

The phrase “unintended consequences” has become a cliché precisely because so many policies and programs intended, for example, to better the situation of the less fortunate have in fact made their situation worse, that it is no longer possible to regard good intentions as automatic harbingers of good results. Anyone whose primary concern is in improving the lot of the less fortunate would therefore, by this time, after decades of experience with negative “unintended consequences,” see a need not only to invest time and efforts to turn good intentions into policies and programs, but also to invest time and efforts afterwards into trying to ferret out answers as to what the actual consequences of those policies and programs have been.

Moreover, anyone whose primary concern was improving the lot of the less fortunate would also be alert and receptive to other factors from *beyond* the vision of the intellectuals, when those other factors have been found empirically to have helped advance the well-being of the less fortunate, even if in ways not contemplated by the intelligentsia and even if in ways counter to the beliefs or visions of the intelligentsia.

In short, one of the ways to test whether expressed concerns for the well-being of the less fortunate represent primarily a concern for that well-being or a use of the less fortunate as a means to condemn society, or to seek either political or moral authority over society—to be on the side of the angels against the forces of evil—would be to see the revealed preferences of intellectuals in terms of how much time and energy they invest in promoting their vision, as compared to how much time and energy they invest in scrutinizing (1) the actual consequences of things done in the name of that vision and (2) benefits to the less fortunate created outside that vision and even counter to that vision.

Crusaders for a “living wage” or to end “sweatshop labor” in the Third World, for example, may invest great amounts of time and energy promoting those goals but virtually none in scrutinizing the many studies done in countries around the world to discover the actual consequences of minimum wage laws in general or of “living wage” laws in particular. These consequences have included such things as higher levels of unemployment and longer periods of unemployment, especially for the least skilled and least experienced segments of the population. Whether one agrees with or disputes these studies, the crucial question here is *whether one bothers to read them at all*.

If the real purpose of social crusades is to make the less fortunate better off, then the actual consequences of such policies as wage control become central and require investigation, in order to avoid “unintended consequences” which have already become widely recognized in the context of many other policies. But if the real purpose of social crusades is to proclaim oneself to be on the side of the angels, then such investigations have a low priority, if any priority at all, since the goal of being on the side of the angels is accomplished when the policies have been advocated and then instituted, after which social crusaders can move on to other issues. The revealed preference of many, if not most, of the intelligentsia has been to be on the side of the angels.

The same conclusion is hard to avoid when looking at the response of intellectuals to improvements in the condition of the poor that follow policies or circumstances which offer no opportunities to be on the side of the angels against the forces of evil. For example, under new economic policies beginning in the 1990s, tens of millions of people in India have risen above that country’s official poverty level. In China, under similar policies begun earlier, a million people a month have risen out of poverty. Surely anyone concerned with the fate of the less fortunate would want to know how this desirable development came about for such vast numbers of very poor people—and therefore how similar improvements might be produced elsewhere in the world. But these and other dramatic increases in living standards, based ultimately on the production of more wealth, arouse little or no interest among most intellectuals.

. . . French writer Raymond Aron has suggested that achieving the ostensible goals of the left without using the methods favored by the left actually provokes resentments:

In fact the European Left has a grudge against the United States mainly because the latter has succeeded by means which were not laid down in the revolutionary code. Prosperity, power, the tendency towards uniformity of economic conditions—these results have been achieved by private initiative, by competition rather than State intervention, in other words by capitalism, which every well-brought-up intellectual has been taught to despise.

Similarly, despite decades of laments in the United States about the poor quality of education in most black schools, studies of particular schools where black students meet or exceed national norms arouse little or no interest among most intellectuals, even those who are active in discussions of racial issues. As with people rising out of poverty in Third World countries, lack of interest in academically successful black schools by people who are otherwise vocal and vehement on racial issues suggests a revealed preference for the condemnation of unsuccessful schools and of the society that maintains such schools.

Sowell, Thomas (2012-03-06). Intellectuals and Society (Kindle Locations 3156-3166). Perseus Books Group. Kindle Edition.

That many, if not most, of these successful black schools do not follow educational notions in vogue among the intelligentsia may be part of the reason for the lack of interest in such schools, just as the lack of interest in how India and China managed to raise the living standards of many millions of poor people may be in part because it was done by moving away from the kinds of economic policies long favored by the left.

Sowell, Thomas (2012-03-06). Intellectuals and Society (Kindle Locations 3169-3172). Perseus Books Group. Kindle Edition.

Few things illustrate the heedlessness of social crusades so plainly or so painfully as the consequences of the worldwide environmentalist crusade to ban the insecticide DDT, on grounds of its adverse effects on some birds' eggs—leading to the melodramatic title of Rachel Carson's best-selling book, ***Silent Spring***, silent presumably because of the extinction of song birds.

But, whatever the harm that DDT might do to the reproduction rates of some birds, it had a very dramatic effect in reducing the incidence of lethal malaria among human beings, by killing the mosquitoes which transmit that disease. For example, before the use of DDT on a mass scale was first introduced into Ceylon (now Sri Lanka) in 1946, there was an average of more than 40,000 cases of malaria annually in Ceylon in the years from 1937 through 1945. But, after the introduction of DDT, the number of cases of malaria there was cut by more than three-quarters by 1949, was under a thousand by 1955, and was in single digits by 1960.

There were similarly steep reductions in the incidence of malaria in other tropical and sub-tropical countries, saving vast numbers of lives around the world.¹⁵ Conversely, after the political success of the anti-DDT crusade by environmentalists, the banning of this insecticide was followed by a resurgence of malaria, taking millions of lives, even in countries where the disease had been all but eradicated. Rachel Carson may have been responsible for more deaths of human beings than anyone without an army. Yet she remains a revered figure among environmental crusaders.

The point here is not that one particular crusade had catastrophic effects but that the crusading spirit of those with the vision of the anointed makes effects on others less important than the self-exaltation of the crusaders. The idea that crusaders "don't mean to do harm—but the harm does not interest them," when they are "absorbed in the endless struggle to think well of themselves" applies far beyond any particular social crusade.

This preoccupation with self-exaltation was perhaps epitomized in the greeting of a Yale law school dean to incoming students as “Citizens of the republic of conscience,” saying, “We are not just a law school of professional excellence; we are an intellectual community of high moral purpose.” In other words, the students were not simply entering an institution designed to teach them legal principles, they were joining those who were on the side of the angels.

Sowell, Thomas (2012-03-06). Intellectuals and Society (Kindle Locations 3188-3207). Perseus Books Group. Kindle Edition.

PART IV — OPTIONAL REALITY

Chapter 10 — Filtering Reality

. . . J.A. Schumpeter said that the first thing a man will do for his ideals is lie. It is not necessary to lie, however, in order to deceive, when filtering will accomplish the same purpose. This can take the form of reporting selective and atypical samples, suppressing some facts altogether, or filtering out the inconvenient meanings or connotations of words.

Sowell, Thomas (2012-03-06). Intellectuals and Society (Kindle Locations 3216-3219). Perseus Books Group. Kindle Edition.

SELECTIVE SAMPLES

Homelessness is another area where much of the media filters what kind of reality gets through to their audience. During his time at CBS News, Bernard Goldberg noticed the difference between what he saw on the street and what was being broadcast on television:

In the 1980s, I started noticing that the homeless people we showed on the news didn't look very much like the homeless people I was tripping over on the sidewalk.

The ones on the sidewalk, by and large, were winos or drug addicts or schizophrenics. They mumbled crazy things or gave you the evil eye when they put paper coffee cups in your face and "asked" for money. . . .

But the ones we liked to show on television were different. They looked as if they came from your neighborhood and mine. They looked like us. And the message from TV news was that they didn't just **look** like us—they **were** like us! On NBC, Tom Brokaw said that the homeless are "people you know."

If the homeless tend to be sanitized in television news, businessmen tend to be demonized in movies and television dramas, as another study found:

Only 37 percent of the fictional entrepreneurs played positive roles, and the proportion of "bad guy businessmen" was almost double that of all other occupations. What's more, they were **really** nasty, committing 40 percent of the murders and 44 percent of the vice crimes. . . Only 8 percent of prime-time criminals were black. . .

Sowell, Thomas (2012-03-06). Intellectuals and Society (Kindle Locations 3235-3248). Perseus Books Group. Kindle Edition.

SUPPRESSING FACTS

No factual information that could reflect negatively on homosexuals is likely to find its way through either media or academic filters, but anything that shows gays as victims can get massive coverage. A search by journalist William McGowan found more than 3,000 media stories about a gay man in Wyoming who was beaten unconscious by thugs and left to die, but fewer than 50 media stories about a teenage boy who was captured and repeatedly raped for hours by two homosexual men, who likewise left him to die. McGowan's search indicated that the second story was not mentioned at all in the **New York Times** or the **Los Angeles Times**, nor was it broadcast on CBS, NBC, ABC or CNN.

Sowell, Thomas (2012-03-06). Intellectuals and Society (Kindle Locations 3361-3366). Perseus Books Group. Kindle Edition.

In short, the first loyalty of many journalists is not to their readers or television audiences who seek information from them, but to protecting the image and interests of the groups they represent under a

“diversity” hiring rationale. Such journalists are also under peer pressure to filter the news, rather than report the facts straight.

Sowell, Thomas (2012-03-06). Intellectuals and Society (Kindle Locations 3385-3388). Perseus Books Group. Kindle Edition.

. . . when actual flesh-and-blood people were examined by the Centers for Disease Control and the U.S. Department of Agriculture, no evidence of malnutrition among Americans with poverty-level incomes was found, nor any significant difference in their intake of vitamins and minerals from that among people in higher income brackets. The only real difference, in this regard, among people in different income brackets, was that being overweight was much more prevalent among the poor than among the affluent. But, as in other contexts, when a story fits the vision, people in the media do not always find it necessary to check whether it also fits the facts.

Sowell, Thomas (2012-03-06). Intellectuals and Society (Kindle Locations 3427-3432). Perseus Books Group. Kindle Edition.

FICTITIOUS PEOPLE

. . .

A contemporary public figure who has had a fictitious personality created for him by the media is Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas. The fictitious Clarence Thomas has been described as a loner, permanently embittered by his controversial Senate confirmation hearings, “a virtual recluse in private life.” A reporter for the *Wall Street Journal* called him “Washington’s most famous recluse.” Justice Thomas was depicted in a *New Yorker* article as someone who can really talk only to his wife and “the couple’s life appears to be one of shared, brooding isolation.” Because Justice Thomas and Justice Antonin Scalia have voted together so often in Supreme Court cases, he has been variously described as “a clone” of Scalia by syndicated columnist Carl Rowan and a “puppet” of Scalia by a lawyer from the American Civil Liberties Union. Similar statements about Justice Thomas’ role on the Supreme Court have been common in the media.

Those who have bothered to check out the facts, however, have discovered a flesh-and-blood Clarence Thomas the exact opposite of the fictitious Clarence Thomas portrayed in the media. Reporters for the *Washington Post*—hardly a supporter of Justice Thomas—interviewed colleagues and former clerks of his, as well as consulting notes made by the late Justice Harry Blackmun at private judicial conferences among the justices, and came up with a radically different picture of the man:

Thomas is perhaps the court’s most accessible justice—except to journalists. . . He is known to spot a group of schoolchildren visiting the court and invite the students to his chambers. Students from his alma mater, family members of former clerks, people he encounters on his drives across the country in his 40-foot Prevost motor coach—all are welcome. . .

Thomas seems to have an unquenchable thirst for conversation. . . A planned 15-minute drop-by invariably turns into an hour, then two, sometimes three, maybe even four, according to interviews with at least a dozen people who have visited with Thomas in his chambers. . . . Washington lawyer Tom Goldstein, whose firm devotes itself primarily to Supreme Court litigation, has met all the justices and has declared Thomas “the most real person” of them all.

Far from being a recluse permanently scarred by his Senate confirmation hearings, Justice Thomas frequently goes back to the Senate at mealtimes, according to the *Washington Post*:

Thomas is hardly a stranger in the Senate. He can be spotted in the Dirksen Senate Office Building cafeteria, eating the hot buffet lunch with his clerks. He is chummy with the women who cook and waitress. He has breakfasted among senators in their private dining room, just a whisper away from some of the lawmakers who virulently opposed his nomination. Who would have imagined that the U.S. Senate, the stage for Thomas’s “high-tech lynching,” as he angrily charged during his 1991 confirmation hearings, is where he enjoys meals?

Others who have actually studied Justice Thomas and interviewed those who have worked with him or encountered him socially have likewise been struck by the difference between the public image and the man himself:

He made a point of introducing himself to every employee at the Court, from cafeteria cooks to the nighttime janitors. He played hoops with the marshals and security guards. He stopped to chat with people in the hallways. Clerks say Thomas had an uncanny ability to recall details of an employee's personal life. He knew their children's names and where they went to school. He seemed to see people who would otherwise go unnoticed. Stephen Smith, a former clerk, recalls an instance when Thomas, on a tour of the maritime courts in 1993 or 1994, was talking to a group of judges. "There was this old woman standing there in one of those blue janitor's uniforms and a bucket, a black woman," Smith recalled. "And she was looking at him, wouldn't dare go up and talk to this important guy. He left the judges there, excused himself, and went over to talk to her. He put out his hand to shake her hand, and she threw her arms around him and gave him a big bear hug."

Among his eight colleagues, Thomas was similarly outgoing and gregarious. Justice Ginsburg said Thomas sometimes dropped by her chambers with a bag of Vidalia onions from Georgia, knowing that her husband was a devoted chef. "A most congenial colleague," said Ginsburg of Thomas. . .

Thomas took an especially keen interest in his clerks and often developed an almost paternal relationship with them. . . When he noticed the treads on Walker's car were thin, he showed her how to measure them for wear and tear. "The next Monday," Walker recalled, "he came in and said, 'I saw some great tires at Price Club, they're a good deal. You should really get them.' And I'm sitting there thinking, here's a Supreme Court justice who's worried about whether my tires are safe."

Many of Thomas's clerks have similar stories to tell.

Another study chronicled Clarence Thomas' life away from Washington:

Behind the wheel of his forty-foot RV, Clarence Thomas couldn't be happier. The '92 Prevost motor coach has a bedroom in the back, plush gray leather chairs, a kitchen, satellite television, and a computerized navigational system. "It's a condo on wheels," he has said—a condo from which he observes the nation and, when he chooses, engages with fellow citizens. He is drawn mostly to small towns and RV campgrounds, national parks, and historic landmarks. Thomas has told friends he has never had a bad experience traveling by motor coach. Away from the urban centers, he often encounters people who don't recognize him or don't care that he's a Supreme Court justice. He loves to pull into a Wal-Mart parking lot in jeans and deck shoes, a cap pulled over his head. Plopped outside the vehicle in a lawn chair, he can sit for hours, chatting up strangers about car waxes and exterior polishes, sipping lemonade.

Justice Thomas also gives talks to "audiences of thousands at major universities," according to the *Washington Times*. But, since he has seldom been seen at fashionable social gatherings of Washington's political and media elites, that makes him a "recluse" as far as the intelligentsia are concerned.

What of Clarence Thomas' work as a Supreme Court justice? The fact that his votes and those of Justice Scalia often coincide says nothing about who persuaded whom, but the media have automatically assumed that it was Scalia who led and Justice Thomas who followed. To know the facts would require knowing what happens at the private conferences among the nine justices, where even their own clerks are not present. Despite sweeping assumptions that reigned for years in the media, a radically different picture emerged when notes taken by the late Justice Harry Blackmun at these conferences became available among his posthumous papers. Author Jan Crawford Greenburg, who consulted Blackmun's notes when writing a book about the Supreme Court (*Supreme Conflict*), found an entirely different pattern from that of the prevailing media vision. Moreover, that pattern emerged early, during Clarence Thomas' first year on the Supreme Court.

In only the third case in which he participated, Justice Thomas initially agreed with the rest of his colleagues and the case looked like it was headed for a 9-to-nothing decision. But Thomas thought about it overnight and decided to dissent from the views of his eight senior colleagues:

As it turned out, Thomas was not alone for long. After he sent his dissent to the other justices, Rehnquist and Scalia sent notes to the justices that they too were changing their votes and would join his opinion. Kennedy declined to join Thomas's dissent, but he also changed his vote and wrote his own dissent . . .

This was something that happened several times that first year alone. Some of Justice Blackmun's notes indicated his surprise at the independence of this new member of the court.

Sowell, Thomas (2012-03-06). Intellectuals and Society (Kindle Locations 3533-3599). Perseus Books Group. Kindle Edition.

VERBAL CLEANSING

. . . The verbal virtuosity of the intellectuals filters words as well as facts, through what might be called verbal cleansing, much like ethnic cleansing. Words which have acquired particular connotations over the years from the experiences of millions of people in successive generations now have those connotations systematically stripped away by a relatively small number of contemporary intellectuals, who simply substitute different words for the same things until the new words replace the old in the media. Thus "bums" has been replaced by "the homeless," "swamps" by "wetlands," and "prostitutes" by "sex workers," for example.

All the things that generations of people have learned from experience about bums, swamps, and prostitutes are in effect erased by the substitution of new words, cleansed of those connotations. Swamps, for example, are often unsightly, slimy, and smelly places, where mosquitoes breed and spread diseases. Sometimes swamps are also places where dangerous creatures like snakes or alligators lurk. But "wetlands" are spoken of in hushed and reverential tones, as one might speak of shrines.

Sowell, Thomas (2012-03-06). Intellectuals and Society (Kindle Locations 3706-3714). Perseus Books Group. Kindle Edition.

Another significant development in the art of verbal cleansing has been changing the names used to describe people who espouse government intervention in the economy and society, as most intellectuals tend to do. In the United States, such people changed their own designation more than once during the course of the twentieth century. At the beginning of that century, such people called themselves "Progressives." However, by the 1920s, experience had led American voters to repudiate Progressivism and to elect national governments with a very different philosophy throughout that entire decade. When the Great Depression of the 1930s again brought to power people with the government intervention philosophy—many of whom had served in the Progressive Woodrow Wilson administration—they now changed their name to "liberals," escaping the connotations of their earlier incarnation, much as people escape their financial debts through bankruptcy.

The long reign of "liberalism" in the United States—which lasted, with few interruptions, from President Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal in the 1930s through President Lyndon B. Johnson's Great Society of the 1960s—ultimately ended with liberalism being so discredited that later Presidential and other political candidates with long records of liberalism rejected that label or rejected labeling altogether as somehow misleading or unworthy. By the end of the twentieth century, many liberals began calling themselves "progressives," thus escaping the connotations which liberalism had acquired over the years, but which connotations no longer applied to the word "progressive," which was from an era too far in the past for most people to associate any experience with that word.

Sowell, Thomas (2012-03-06). Intellectuals and Society (Kindle Locations 3720-3732). Perseus Books Group. Kindle Edition.

OBJECTIVITY VERSUS IMPARTIALITY

When the *New York Times* listed three best-selling political books, written respectively by Mike Huckabee, Dick Morris and Frank I. Luntz—all Fox News Channel commentators—among books on personal advice, listing these political books among books on such subjects as how to lose weight, instead of on the more prominent “hardcover non-fiction” list, this was not simply a question of being “unfair” to these particular authors but, more fundamentally, a misleading of the paper’s general readers and of bookstores across the country, who use the list of the best-selling, hardcover non-fiction books to determine what books to order and feature in their displays.

Intellectuals who take it upon themselves to filter facts, in the interest of their own vision, are denying to others the right they claim for themselves, to look at the world as it is and reach their own conclusions.

Sowell, Thomas (2012-03-06). Intellectuals and Society (Kindle Locations 3779-3786). Perseus Books Group. Kindle Edition.

Chapter 11 — Subjective Truth

. . . when Robert Reich was challenged on the factual accuracy of his published accounts of various meetings that had been videotaped by others, showing situations radically different from what he had described in his book, his reply was: “I claim no higher truth than my own perceptions.” If truth is subjective, then its entire purpose becomes meaningless. However, that may seem to some to be a small price to pay in order to preserve a vision on which many intellectuals’ sense of themselves, and of their role in society, depends.

Sowell, Thomas (2012-03-06). Intellectuals and Society (Kindle Locations 3794-3798). Perseus Books Group. Kindle Edition.

. . . Will Rogers said long ago, “When you ain’t nothing else, you can claim to be an artist—and nobody can prove you ain’t.”

Sowell, Thomas (2012-03-06). Intellectuals and Society (Kindle Locations 3855-3856). Perseus Books Group. Kindle Edition.

THE LOCALIZATION OF EVIL

Many among the intelligentsia see themselves as agents of “change,” a term often used loosely, almost generically, as if things are so bad that “change” can be presupposed to be a change for the better. . . .

Sowell, Thomas (2012-03-06). Intellectuals and Society (Kindle Locations 3859-3861). Perseus Books Group. Kindle Edition.

. . . sins and shortcomings universally present in human beings would leave little reason to hope for something dramatically better in a rearranged society, so that even a revolution could be much like rearranging the deck chairs on the Titanic. Incremental reforms,

Sowell, Thomas (2012-03-06). Intellectuals and Society (Kindle Locations 3863-3865). Perseus Books Group. Kindle Edition.

THE INVIDIOUS AND THE DRAMATIC

. . . Although thinking is the core activity of intellectuals, thinking is something that everyone does. The only rationale or justification for there being a special class of intellectuals is that they do it better—**from an intellectual standpoint**, in terms of the originality, complexity and internal consistency of their ideas, together with a large knowledge base of a certain kind of knowledge, and the consonance of these ideas with accepted premises among intellectuals—but not necessarily from the standpoint of empirical consequences to others.

Sowell, Thomas (2012-03-06). Intellectuals and Society (Kindle Locations 3892-3896). Perseus Books Group. Kindle Edition.

The Invidious

. . . a fool can put on his coat better than a wise man can put it on for him.

Sowell, Thomas (2012-03-06). Intellectuals and Society (Kindle Locations 3908-3909). Perseus Books Group. Kindle Edition.

As already noted, there were 24 million prices to be set by central planners in the Soviet Union⁸—an impossible task if those prices were to bear any rational relationship to one another as means of reflecting the relative scarcities or costs of goods and services or the relative desires of consumers of those 24 million goods and services, compared to one another, and allocating the resources for their

production accordingly. But while this was an overwhelming task for any central planning commission, it has been a very manageable task in market economies for millions of individual consumers and producers, each keeping track of only those relatively few prices relevant to their own personal decision-making, with the coordination of the allocation of resources and the distribution of products and services in the economy as a whole being done through price competition in the market for inputs and outputs.

Sowell, Thomas (2012-03-06). Intellectuals and Society (Kindle Locations 3915-3921). Perseus Books Group. Kindle Edition.

... Credentialed ignorance is still ignorance. Ironically, the big problem for supposedly knowledgeable intellectuals is that they do not have nearly enough knowledge to do what they set out to do. Nobody does.

Sowell, Thomas (2012-03-06). Intellectuals and Society (Kindle Locations 3923-3924). Perseus Books Group. Kindle Edition.

... an incidental comment that can be construed as “racist” can provoke more outrage in the American media than the beheading of innocent people by terrorists and the dissemination of the videotapes of these beheadings to eager audiences in the Middle East.

Sowell, Thomas (2012-03-06). Intellectuals and Society (Kindle Locations 3932-3934). Perseus Books Group. Kindle Edition.

The Dramatic

Perhaps the classic example of a widespread preference for emotionally satisfying explanations has been the reaction of the American media, politicians and much of the public to the changing prices—and, in the 1970s, shortages—of gasoline. None of these events has required a level of economic sophistication going beyond that in any standard introductory economics textbook. Indeed, it has not been necessary to rise even to that level of sophistication in order to understand how supply and demand operate for a standard product like oil, traded on a massive scale in a vast world market, in which even companies called “Big Oil” in the United States have little or no control of the price. . . .

Sowell, Thomas (2012-03-06). Intellectuals and Society (Kindle Locations 4014-4018). Perseus Books Group. Kindle Edition.

Part V — INTELLECTUALS AND THE LAW

Chapter 12 — Changing the Law

. . . The Constitution of the United States explicitly forbids ex post facto laws, so that citizens cannot be punished or held liable for actions which were not illegal when those actions took place. But judges making decisions on the basis of their own conceptions of fairness, compassion or social justice are, in effect, creating laws after the fact, which those subject to such laws could not have known in advance.

Sowell, Thomas (2012-03-06). Intellectuals and Society (Kindle Locations 4073-4076). Perseus Books Group. Kindle Edition.

METHODS OF CHANGE

Laws must of course change as conditions change in society but there is a fundamental difference between laws that change by the electorate deciding to vote for officials who will pass new legislation that will then become laws announced in advance—versus laws changed individually by judges who inform those standing before them in court how the judge’s new interpretation applies to them.

Sowell, Thomas (2012-03-06). Intellectuals and Society (Kindle Locations 4086-4089). Perseus Books Group. Kindle Edition.

By the second half of the twentieth century, the view of law as something to be deliberately shaped according to the spirit of the times, as interpreted by intellectual elites, became more common in the leading law schools and among judges. Professor Ronald Dworkin of Oxford University epitomized this approach when he dismissed the systemic evolution of the law as a “silly faith,” based on “the chaotic and unprincipled development of history,”—systemic processes being equated with chaos, as they have been among those who promoted central economic planning rather than the systemic interactions of markets. In both cases, the preference has been for an elite to impose its vision, overriding if necessary the views of the masses of their fellow citizens, for Dworkin also said, “a more equal society is a better society even if its citizens prefer inequality.” In short, this vision has sought to impose social and economic equality through a political inequality that would allow an elite to override what the population at large wants. Despite Professor Dworkin’s claim, it hardly seems likely that most people really prefer inequality. What they may prefer is the freedom that systemic processes permit, rather than elite dictation, even if those systemic processes entail a certain amount of economic inequality.

Sowell, Thomas (2012-03-06). Intellectuals and Society (Kindle Locations 4105-4115). Perseus Books Group. Kindle Edition.

The Constitution and the Courts

If courts “interpreted the Constitution in its strict letter, as some proposed,” Wilson said, it would turn that document into “a strait-jacket.” Wilson used yet another argument that would be repeated by many others, on into the next century—namely, the role of “change” in general and technological change in particular: “When the Constitution was framed there were no railways, there was no telegraph, there was no telephone,” he said. Like others who would repeat this kind of argument for generations to come—citing television, computers, and other new technological marvels—Wilson made no attempt whatever to show how these or other changes specifically required courts to reach new and different interpretations of the Constitution. One could go through a long list of controversial

landmark Supreme Court decisions, from **Marbury v. Madison** to **Roe v. Wade**, finding few—if any—where technological change made any difference.

Sowell, Thomas (2012-03-06). Intellectuals and Society (Kindle Locations 4156-4164). Perseus Books Group. Kindle Edition.

The salient question that is resolutely ignored in all the rhetoric about “change” is the central question of decision-making in general: Who is to decide? . . . Merely repeating the mantra of “change” offers no reason why judges specifically are the ones to make the changes. It is another of the many arguments without arguments, unless repetition is considered an argument.

Sowell, Thomas (2012-03-06). Intellectuals and Society (Kindle Locations 4172-4176). Perseus Books Group. Kindle Edition.

As far back as 1908, Roscoe Pound, later to become dean of the Harvard Law School, referred to the desirability of “a living constitution by judicial interpretation.” He called for “an awakening of juristic activity,” for “the sociological jurist,” and declared that law “must be judged by the results it achieves.” What he called “mechanical jurisprudence” was condemned for “its failure to respond to vital needs of present-day life.” When law “becomes a body of rules,” that “is the condition against which sociologists now protest, and protest rightly,” he said. Although Pound depicted a “gulf between legal thought and popular thought” as a reason to bring the former into line with the latter, in order to have a system of law which “conforms to the moral sense of the community,” this apparently populist notion became merely a rhetorical backdrop in the end, as he called for law “in the hands of a progressive and enlightened caste whose conceptions are in advance of the public and whose leadership is bringing popular thought to a higher level.”

In short, Roscoe Pound advocated that an anointed elite change the nature of law to conform to what they defined as the “vital needs of present-day life,” despite being at variance with (“in advance of”) the public, with whose “moral sense” the law was supposedly being made to conform. Law, according to Pound, should also reflect what he repeatedly called—without definition—“social justice.”

Sowell, Thomas (2012-03-06). Intellectuals and Society (Kindle Locations 4189-4201). Perseus Books Group. Kindle Edition.

Like Pound, Brandeis argued that courts “continued to ignore newly arisen social needs” and “complacently” applied such old-fashioned notions as “the sacredness of private property.” Like many others then and later, Brandeis treated property rights as just special privileges for a fortunate few, rather than as a limitation on the power of politicians. The culmination of the Progressives’ conception of property rights came in 2005, when the Supreme Court in **Kelo v. New London** decreed that politicians could seize private property—typically the homes and businesses of working class and middle class people—and turn it over to other private parties, typically developers who would build things for more upscale people, who would pay more in taxes into coffers controlled by politicians.

Again, like Pound, Brandeis noted some recent trends toward “a better appreciation by the courts of existing social needs.” Why judges were qualified to be arbiters of what constituted “social needs” was not explained—which is to say, the more general question of elites going beyond the boundaries of their professional competence was not addressed. Brandeis also invoked “social justice,” without definition,

Sowell, Thomas (2012-03-06). Intellectuals and Society (Kindle Locations 4216-4226). Perseus Books Group. Kindle Edition.

. . . Professor (and later Justice) Ruth Bader Ginsburg said, “Boldly dynamic interpretation, departing radically from the original understanding, is required.”

Sowell, Thomas (2012-03-06). Intellectuals and Society (Kindle Locations 4253-4254). Perseus Books Group. Kindle Edition.

Judicial Restraint and “Original Intent”

The Constitution was a very plainly written document, and when it used phrases like “an establishment of religion,” for example, it referred to something well known to people who had already lived under an established church, the Church of England. The prohibition against an establishment of religion had nothing to do with a “wall of separation” between church and state, which appears nowhere in the Constitution, but was a phrase from Thomas Jefferson. There was nothing esoteric about the phrase “an establishment of religion.” For more than a hundred years after the Constitution was written, it never meant that it was illegal to display religious symbols on government property, however much some people in later times might wish that this was what it meant, and however much some modern judges might be willing to accommodate that wish.

Sowell, Thomas (2012-03-06). Intellectuals and Society (Kindle Locations 4539-4545). Perseus Books Group. Kindle Edition.

Chapter 13 — Law and "Results"

PROPERTY RIGHTS

. . . Chief Justice John Marshall said that the power to tax is the power to destroy. The power of arbitrary regulation is the power to extort—just as is the power to put the burden of proof on the accused. Among the justifications offered by contemporary judges for politicians' extraction of concessions from builders—in this case, selling a certain percentage of the housing they build at prices below the usual market price—is that this is done in exchange for “benefits” to the builders. One of these “benefits” is being eligible for “expedited processing.” In other words, by the power of delay, local authorities can extract concessions. . . .

Sowell, Thomas (2012-03-06). Intellectuals and Society (Kindle Locations 4778-4783). Perseus Books Group. Kindle Edition.

CRIME

The vision of the anointed has long de-emphasized punishment and emphasized prevention by getting at the social “root causes” of crime beforehand and by “rehabilitation” of criminals afterwards. Subsidiary themes in this vision include mitigation of personal responsibility on the part of criminals as a result of unhappy childhoods, stressful adulthoods or other factors assumed to be beyond the control of the individual. Conflicting theories of crime can be debated endlessly, and no doubt will be, as will many other questions expanded to unanswerable dimensions. What is relevant here, however, is what the evidence of actual results has been from the ascendancy and pervasive prevalence of the intellectuals' vision of crime—and what the intellectuals' reactions have been to that evidence.

In the United States, where murder rates had been going down for decades, and were in 1961 less than half of what they had been in 1933, the legal reforms of the 1960s—applying the ideas of intellectuals and widely applauded by the intelligentsia—were followed almost immediately by a sharp reversal of this long downward trend, with the murder rate doubling by 1974. In Britain, the ascendancy of the same vision of crime was followed by similarly sudden reversals of previous downward trends in crime rates. As one study noted:

Scholars of criminology have traced a long decline in interpersonal violence since the late Middle Ages until an abrupt and puzzling reversal occurred in the middle of the twentieth century. . . . And a statistical comparison of crime in England and Wales with crime in America, based on 1995 figures, discovered that for three categories of violent crime—assaults, burglary, and robbery—the English are now at far greater risk than Americans.

Sowell, Thomas (2012-03-06). Intellectuals and Society (Kindle Locations 4802-4815). Perseus Books Group. Kindle Edition.

In Britain, the anti-gun ideology is so strong that even the use of toy guns in self-defense is forbidden:

Merely threatening to defend oneself can also prove illegal, as an elderly lady discovered. She succeeded in frightening off a gang of thugs by firing a blank from a toy gun, only to be arrested for the crime of putting someone in fear with an imitation firearm. Use of a toy gun for self-defense during a housebreak is also unacceptable, as a householder found who had detained with an imitation gun two men who were burgling his home. He called the police, but when they arrived they arrested him for a firearms offence.

Sowell, Thomas (2012-03-06). Intellectuals and Society (Kindle Locations 4821-4826). Perseus Books Group. Kindle Edition.

As gun control laws were made ever tighter in Britain toward the end of the twentieth century, murder rates rose by 34 percent, while murder rates in Canada and the United States were falling by 34 percent and 39 percent, respectively. Murder rates in France and Italy were also falling, by 25 percent and 59 percent, respectively. Britain, with its strong anti-gun ideology among the intellectual and political elites, was an exception to international trends. Meanwhile, Americans' purchases of guns increased during this same period, gun sales surging "to a peak in 1993 of nearly 8 million small arms, of which 4 million were handguns." Far from leading to more murders, this was a period of declining murder rates in the United States. Altogether, there were an estimated 200 million guns in the United States, and rates of violent crime have been lowest in those places where there have been the highest incidence of gun ownership. The same has been true of Switzerland.

Yet none of this has caused second thoughts about gun control among either the American or British intelligentsia. In Britain, both ideology and government policy have taken a negative view of other measures of self-defense as well. Opposition to individual self-defense by law-abiding citizens extends even beyond guns or imitation guns. A middle-aged man attacked by two thugs in a London subway car "unsheathed a sword blade in his walking stick and slashed at one of them"—and was arrested along with his assailants, for carrying an offensive weapon. Even putting up barbed wire around a garden and its shed that had been broken into several times was forbidden by local authorities, fearful of being sued if a thief injured himself while trying to break in. That such a lawsuit would be taken seriously is another sign of the prevailing notions among British officials, operating in a climate of opinion created by the British intelligentsia.

The "root causes" theory of crime has likewise remained impervious to evidence on both sides of the Atlantic. In both the United States and England, crime rates soared during years when the supposed "root causes of crime"—poverty and barriers to opportunity—were visibly lessening. As if to make a complete mockery of the "root causes" theory, the ghetto riots that swept across American cities in the 1960s were less common in Southern cities, where racial discrimination was still most visible, and the most lethal riot of that era occurred in Detroit, where the poverty rate among blacks was only half that of blacks nationwide, while the homeownership rate among blacks was higher than among blacks in any other city, and the black unemployment rate in Detroit was 3.4 percent, which was lower than the unemployment rate among **whites** nationwide.

Urban riots were most numerous during the administration of President Lyndon Johnson, which was marked by landmark civil rights legislation and a massive expansion of social programs called "the war on poverty." Conversely, such riots became virtually non-existent during the eight years of the Reagan administration, which de-emphasized such things.

Sowell, Thomas (2012-03-06). Intellectuals and Society (Kindle Locations 4841-4865). Perseus Books Group. Kindle Edition.

For many of those with the vision of the anointed, a wide difference between the beliefs and concerns of the population at large and the beliefs and concerns of themselves and like-minded peers is not a reason for reconsideration, but a source of pride in being one of the anointed with a higher vision.

Meanwhile, in the United States, after many years of rising crime rates had built up sufficient public outrage to force a change in policy, rates of imprisonment rose—and crime rates began falling for the first time in years. Those with the vision of the anointed lamented the rising prison population in the country and, when they acknowledged the declining crime rate at all, confessed themselves baffled by it, as if it were a strange coincidence that crime was declining as more criminals were taken off the streets.

Sowell, Thomas (2012-03-06). Intellectuals and Society (Kindle Locations 4900-4907). Perseus Books Group. Kindle Edition.

In Britain, as in the United States, it is often taken as axiomatic that “prisons are ineffective,” as *The Economist* magazine put it. The reason: “They may keep offenders off the streets, but they fail to discourage them from offending. Two-thirds of ex-prisoners are re-arrested within three years of being released.” By this kind of reasoning, food is ineffective as a response to hunger because it is only a matter of time after eating before you get hungry again—a kind of recidivism, if you will. Like many other things, incarceration only works when it is done. The fact that criminals commit crimes when they are no longer incarcerated says nothing about whether incarceration is effective in reducing crime. The empirical question of the effect on the crime rate of keeping more criminals off the streets was not even considered in this sweeping dismissal of prisons as “ineffective.”

Sowell, Thomas (2012-03-06). Intellectuals and Society (Kindle Locations 4949-4956). Perseus Books Group. Kindle Edition.

As a young man visiting Britain shortly after the Second World War, Lee Kuan Yew was so impressed with the orderly and law-abiding people of London that he returned to his native Singapore determined to transform it from the poverty-stricken and crime-ridden place that it was at the time. Later, as a leader of the city-state of Singapore for many years, Lee Kuan Yew instituted policies that resulted in Singapore’s rise to unprecedented levels of prosperity, with an equally dramatic fall in crime. By the beginning of the twenty-first century, the crime rate per 100,000 people in Singapore was 693 and in Britain was over 10,000. Singapore had, in effect, gone back in time to policies and methods now disdained by the intelligentsia as “outmoded” and “simplistic.”

Sowell, Thomas (2012-03-06). Intellectuals and Society (Kindle Locations 4974-4979). Perseus Books Group. Kindle Edition.

The fact that ordinary, common sense measures against crime are effective remains a matter of surprise among many of the intelligentsia. After decades of controversy over ways of reducing crime, in 2009 such news rated a headline in the *San Francisco Chronicle*: “Homicides Plummet as Police Flood Tough Areas.” The account began: “San Francisco’s homicide total for the first half of 2009 hit a nine-year low—falling more than 50 percent from last year—a drop that police officials attribute to flooding high-crime areas with officers and focusing on the handful of people who commit most of the crimes.”

Sowell, Thomas (2012-03-06). Intellectuals and Society (Kindle Locations 5005-5009). Perseus Books Group. Kindle Edition.

PART VI — INTELLECTUALS AND WAR

Chapter 14 — The World Wars

THE FIRST WORLD WAR

America at War

The ostensible cause of the entry of the United States into the stalemated carnage in Europe during the First World War was German submarines sinking passenger ships which had American passengers on board. But these were ships entering a war zone in which both the British and the Germans were maintaining naval blockades, the former with surface ships and the latter with submarines—and each with the intention of denying the other both war materiel and food. Moreover, the most famous of these sinkings by German submarines, that of the *Lusitania*, was of a British passenger ship that was, years later, revealed to have been secretly carrying military supplies.

Sowell, Thomas (2012-03-06). Intellectuals and Society (Kindle Locations 5106-5111). Perseus Books Group. Kindle Edition.

. . . it was the insistence by Woodrow Wilson on a right of Americans to sail safely into blockaded ports during wartime which created the setting for these tragedies. He had on his side international conventions created before the submarine became a major factor in naval warfare. Eventually, he made Germany's submarine warfare against ships sailing to enemy ports the centerpiece of his appeal to Congress in 1917 to declare war on Germany.

Sowell, Thomas (2012-03-06). Intellectuals and Society (Kindle Locations 5115-5118). Perseus Books Group. Kindle Edition.

. . . In a later time, Adolf Hitler would say, "I have to attain immortality, even if the whole German nation perishes in the process."

Sowell, Thomas (2012-03-06). Intellectuals and Society (Kindle Locations 5131-5132). Perseus Books Group. Kindle Edition.

THE SECOND WORLD WAR

Intellectuals Between World Affairs

. . . Kingsley Martin treated those with views different from his own regarding war and peace as having psychological defects, rather than having arguments that required being answered with other arguments:

To have a foreign enemy in the offing enables us to hate with a good conscience. . . It is only in time of war that we get a complete moral holiday, when all the things which we have learned at our mother's knee, all the moral inhibitions imposed by education and society, can be wholeheartedly thrown aside, when it becomes justifiable to hit below the belt, when it is one's duty to lie, and killing is no longer murder.

. . . Such views were not peculiar to British and American intellectuals. The French intelligentsia played a major role in the promotion of pacifism between the two World Wars. Even before the Treaty of Versailles was signed, internationally renowned French writer Romain Rolland—recipient of France's Grand Prix de Littérature, later elected to the Russian Academy of Sciences and offered the Goethe Prize

by Germany, as well as recipient of the Nobel Prize for Literature—issued a manifesto calling on intellectuals in all countries to oppose militarism and nationalism, in order to promote peace.

In 1926, prominent intellectuals from a number of countries signed an internationally publicized petition calling for “some definite step toward complete disarmament and the demilitarizing of the mind of civilized nations.” Among those who signed were H.G. Wells and Bertrand Russell in England and Romain Rolland and Georges Duhamel in France. The petition called for a ban on military conscription, in part “to rid the world of the spirit of militarism.”

Behind such arguments was the crucial assumption that both physical and moral disarmament were necessary to sustain peace. Neither in this petition nor in other statements expressing similar views was there much, if any, expressed concern that both kinds of disarmament would leave the disarmed nations at the mercy of those nations which did not disarm in either sense, thus making a new war look more attractive to the latter because it would look more winnable. Hitler, for example, banned the antiwar classic *All Quiet on the Western Front*, as he wanted neither moral nor physical disarmament in Germany, but carefully followed both phenomena in Western democracies, as he plotted his moves against them.

Pacifists of this era seemed not to think of other nations as prospective enemies but of *war itself* as the enemy, with weapons of war and those who manufactured these weapons—“merchants of death” being the fashionable phrase of the times and the title of a best-selling 1934 book—also being enemies. The “merchants of death wax fat and bloated,” declared John Dewey in 1935. Romain Rolland called them “profiteers of massacre.” H.G. Wells said, “war equipment has followed blindly upon industrial advance until it has become a monstrous and immediate danger to the community.” Harold Laski spoke of the “wickedness of armaments.” Aldous Huxley referred to a battleship as a “repulsive” insect, a “huge bug,” which “squatted there on the water, all its poisonous armory enlarged into instruments of destruction, every bristle a gun, every pore a torpedo tube,” and added: “Men had created this enormous working model of a loathsome insect for the express purpose of destroying other men.”

Pacifists did not see military forces as deterrents to other nations’ military forces but as malign influences in and of themselves.

Sowell, Thomas (2012-03-06). Intellectuals and Society (Kindle Locations 5301-5333). Perseus Books Group. Kindle Edition.

Leaders of the drive to rewrite history textbooks called their goal “moral disarmament” to match the military disarmament which many regarded as another key to peace. Lists of textbooks targeted for removal from the schools were made by Georges Lapierre, one of the SN leaders. By 1929, he was able to boast of all the “bellicose” books the SN campaign had gotten taken out of the schools, rewritten, or replaced. Faced with the threat of losing a share of the large textbook market, French publishers caved in to union demands that books about the First World War be revised to reflect “impartiality” among nations and to promote pacifism.

Sowell, Thomas (2012-03-06). Intellectuals and Society (Kindle Locations 5366-5370). Perseus Books Group. Kindle Edition.

France’s behavior in the Second World War was in extraordinary contrast with its behavior in the First World War. France fought off the German invaders for four long years during the First World War, despite suffering horrendous casualties—more wartime deaths than a larger country like the United States has ever suffered in any war or in all its wars put together. Yet, during the Second World War, France surrendered after just six weeks of fighting in 1940. In the bitter moment of defeat, the head of the teachers’ union was told: “You are partially responsible for the defeat.” Charles de Gaulle, François Mauriac, and many other Frenchmen blamed a lack of national will, or general moral decay, for the sudden and humiliating collapse of France in 1940.

Sowell, Thomas (2012-03-06). Intellectuals and Society (Kindle Locations 5381-5387). Perseus Books Group. Kindle Edition.

Hitler said that France was no longer the same country as the France that had fought doggedly through four years of the First World War, that the contemporary French were lacking in the personal strengths necessary for victory, and would falter and surrender. That is in fact largely what happened. . . .

Sowell, Thomas (2012-03-06). Intellectuals and Society (Kindle Locations 5395-5397). Perseus Books Group. Kindle Edition.

Joad was one of those who wrote graphically of the horrors and agonies of war, though Winston Churchill warned that Britain “cannot avoid war by dilating upon its horrors.” In Britain, as in France, patriotism was considered suspect as a cause of war. H.G. Wells, for example, declared himself against “the teaching of patriotic histories that sustain and carry on the poisonous war-making tradition of the past” and wanted British citizenship replaced by “world citizenship.” He regarded patriotism as a useless relic to be replaced by “the idea of cosmopolitan duty.” J.B. Priestley likewise saw patriotism as “a mighty force, chiefly used for evil.” A letter to The Times of London in 1936, signed by such prominent intellectuals as Aldous Huxley, Rebecca West, and Leonard Woolf, called for “the spread of the cosmopolitan spirit” and called for “writers in all countries” to “help all peoples to feel their underlying kinship.”

Meanwhile, Hitler was following such developments in Britain and France, as he made his own plans and assessed the prospects of military victory.

Almost as remarkable as the lengths to which the pacifists of the 1930s went was the verbal virtuosity with which they downplayed the dangers of the pacifism they were advocating while Hitler was rearming on a massive scale in Germany and promoting the very patriotism among Germans that was being eroded by the intelligentsia in the democracies.

Sowell, Thomas (2012-03-06). Intellectuals and Society (Kindle Locations 5429-5442). Perseus Books Group. Kindle Edition.

. . . In France, novelist Jean Giono asked what was the worst that could happen if the Germans invaded France. The French would become Germans, he said. “I prefer being a living German to being a dead Frenchman.” Literary figure Simone Weil argued along similar lines, asking “why is the possibility of German hegemony worse than French hegemony?”

Just a little over two years after this abstract question about abstract people, the Nazi conquest of France made the consequences of Hitler’s hegemony much more painfully specific. In the aftermath of France’s defeat, Simone Weil fled to England to escape the dangers of genocidal Nazi rule in France because, though a practicing Christian, her ancestors were Jewish and that was enough to get other Jews in France sent to Nazi death camps. After the German invasion of France, even Bertrand Russell changed his mind and declared that fighting back was a lesser evil than submitting to the Nazis. In France, Georges Lapierre, who had spearheaded the drive against “bellicose” textbooks in French schools became, in the wake of France’s defeat, part of the underground resistance to Nazi rule, but was captured and sent to the Dachau concentration camp, where he died. Weil and Lapierre learned from experience, but too late to spare themselves or their country the consequences of the things they had advocated. . . .

Sowell, Thomas (2012-03-06). Intellectuals and Society (Kindle Locations 5462-5473). Perseus Books Group. Kindle Edition.

. . . Nothing is easier than to get peaceful people to renounce violence, even when they provide no concrete ways to prevent violence from others.

The French did not want to hear anything bad about Germany. Even Hitler's *Mein Kampf*, which spelled out his hostile intentions toward France, did not get through to the intelligentsia or to the public because a French court stopped its full translation, so that only expurgated versions were available to the few who were interested. By the late 1930s, as refugees from Germany fled to France, bearing stories of the horrors of the Nazi regime, their stories were not only widely rejected but, because many of these refugees were Jewish, this provoked increased anti-Semitism, based on the notion that Jews were trying to provoke a war between France and Germany. Anti-Semitism was not confined to the masses, but was common among French intellectuals as well.

In Britain, as in France, there was strong resistance among the intelligentsia to recognizing the nature of the Nazi regime within Germany or the external threat that it posed to Western democracies. The influential *Manchester Guardian* said that, despite the Nazis' radical ideas, they would act like "ordinary politicians" when they took office. Britain's largest circulation newspaper at the time, the *Daily Herald*, dismissed Hitler as a "clown" and opined that he would share the fate of his immediate predecessors as Chancellor of Germany, whose terms had lasted only a matter of weeks. The *Daily Telegraph* likewise said that Hitler was "done for" and would be gone before the end of 1932. Harold Laski likewise declared in 1932 that "the Hitlerite movement has passed its apogee," that Hitler was "a cheap conspirator rather than an inspired revolutionary, the creature of circumstances rather than the maker of destiny."

The most influential British newspaper, *The Times* of London, considered Hitler a "moderate," at least compared to other members of his party. After Hitler and the Nazis achieved supreme power in Germany in 1933, *The Times* was especially resistant to letting news of the Nazis' domestic oppressions or international threat reach the public. Dispatches from *The Times'* own foreign correspondents in Germany were often filtered, rewritten, and sometimes rejected outright when they reported the raw reality of what was happening under Hitler. Complaints from these correspondents were unavailing, and some resigned in protest against the newspaper's filtering of their dispatches critical of the Nazi regime and reassigning them to places away from crucial events in Germany, while *The Times'* editorials supported Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain's appeasement policies toward Germany. *Times* editor Geoffrey Dawson wrote candidly to his Geneva correspondent:

I do my utmost, night after night, to keep out of the paper anything that might hurt their [German] susceptibilities. . . . I have always been convinced that the peace of the world depends more than anything else upon our getting into reasonable relations with Germany.

Here, as in other contexts, the harm done by the intelligentsia seems especially great when they step out beyond the bounds of their competence (in this case, gathering and reporting news) to seek a wider and greater role in shaping events (in this case, by filtering news to fit their vision).

Sowell, Thomas (2012-03-06). Intellectuals and Society (Kindle Locations 5562-5590). Perseus Books Group. Kindle Edition.

Hitler bet everything on irresolution by the French. He won his bet and tens of millions of people later lost their lives as a result.

Sowell, Thomas (2012-03-06). Intellectuals and Society (Kindle Locations 5629-5630). Perseus Books Group. Kindle Edition.

. . . When the French Foreign Minister, Pierre-Étienne Flandin, met with British Prime Minister Stanley Baldwin, to ask only for British political support for action that France might take in response to German remilitarization of the Rhineland—France already having the *military* means to respond unilaterally—according to Flandin, Baldwin's response was: "You may be right, but if there is *even one chance in a hundred* that war would follow from your police operation, I have not the right to commit England." This kind of thinking was commonplace at the time, as if there were no dangers from *inaction*

to be weighed in the balance. In retrospect, we now know that Western democracies' inaction in response to Hitler's repeated provocations were crucial to his decisions to move toward war, confident that Western leaders were too timid to respond in time, or perhaps even at all.

Sowell, Thomas (2012-03-06). Intellectuals and Society (Kindle Locations 5642-5649). Perseus Books Group. Kindle Edition.

... There has probably never been a leader of a democratic nation more widely or more enthusiastically acclaimed, by the public, in the press, and by members of opposition parties as well as his own, as British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain was when he returned from the Munich conference of 1938, waving an agreement with Hitler which he characterized as producing "peace for our time." Less than a year later, the biggest and most bloody war in all of human history began.

Sowell, Thomas (2012-03-06). Intellectuals and Society (Kindle Locations 5659-5663). Perseus Books Group. Kindle Edition.

The Outbreak of War

The aggressor Axis nations in the Second World War—Germany, Italy and Japan—did not have the resources, and were well aware that they did not have the resources, to match the combined resources of the democratic nations, including Britain, France, and the United States, in an arms race. Achieving the goals of the Axis powers depended on (1) the Western democracies not mobilizing their resources in time to stave off devastating defeats, which in fact the Axis inflicted time and again during the first three years of the Second World War, and (2) not having the fortitude to continue fighting in the face of an unbroken string of bloody losses and retreats, both in Europe and in Asia, until such time as their greater resources could eventually be mobilized to begin counter-attacks.

That strategy came dangerously close to success. It was November 1942—three years after Britain had entered the Second World War—before British Prime Minister Winston Churchill could say, after the battle of El Alamein in North Africa, "we have a new experience. We have victory." There had been nothing but a steady stream of defeats and retreats for the British up to that point, both in Europe and in Asia, and few expected Britain itself to survive in 1940, after France fell to defeat in just six weeks of fighting and the *Luftwaffe* launched its massive bombings of London and other British cities. Americans also had their first military victory in 1942, with incredible good luck overcoming lopsided Japanese naval superiority at the battle of Midway.

Intellectuals played a major role in bringing both Britain and the United States to such a desperate situation with a steady drumbeat of pacifist, anti-national-defense efforts between the two World Wars. In October 1938, a month after Munich and less than a year before the beginning of the Second World War, the influential British journal *New Statesman and Nation* described rearmament as "only an inefficient and wasteful form of subsidy to industries which can find no better employment for their capital" and declared that "we shall not regain self-respect by trebling the numbers of our aeroplanes." Even in February 1939, just months before the outbreak of the Second World War, the *New Statesman and Nation* referred to "the international Bedlam rearmament race" and questioned the money being made by "makers of aircraft and munitions" who were described as "friends" of the "Tory Government." We now know that those aircraft and munitions provided the narrow margin by which Britain survived Hitler's aerial onslaught a year later, despite a widespread view in 1940 that Britain would not survive. History also suggests that years of "arms race" and "merchants of death" rhetoric contributed to making that margin of survival so narrow and precarious. Intellectuals played a major role in creating the atmosphere of both military weakness and political irresolution within democratic nations, which made a war against those nations look winnable to the leaders of the Axis dictatorships. In addition to thus helping bring on the most devastating war in human history, intellectuals so impeded the buildup and modernizing of military forces in democratic nations in the years leading up to that war—demonizing

military equipment suppliers as “merchants of death,” being a classic example—that this ensured that American and British armed forces would often be outgunned in battle, until belated and desperate efforts, both in war industries and on the battlefields, narrowly avoided total defeat and later turned the tide that led ultimately to victory.

The wartime costs of prewar self-indulgences in pacifist moral preening and anti-military crusades by the intelligentsia were staggering in both blood and treasure. Had Hitler and his allies won the Second World War, the enduring costs for the whole human race would have been incalculable.

Neglect of history has allowed us today to forget how narrowly the Western democracies as a whole escaped the ultimate catastrophe of a victory by Hitler and his allies. More important, it has allowed us to forget what brought the Western democracies to such a perilous point in the first place—and the potential for the same notions and attitudes, promoted by today’s intelligentsia as by the intelligentsia between the two World Wars, to bring us to the same perilous tipping point again, with no assurance that either the luck or the fortitude that saved us the first time will do so again.

Sowell, Thomas (2012-03-06). Intellectuals and Society (Kindle Locations 5684-5718). Perseus Books Group. Kindle Edition.

Chapter 15 — The Cold War and Beyond

The timid civilized world has found nothing with which to oppose the onslaught of a sudden revival of barefaced barbarity, other than concessions and smiles.

Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn

REPLAYING THE 1930s

. . . To disarmament advocates of his day, Churchill had said, “When you have peace, you will have disarmament”—not the other way around. . .

Sowell, Thomas (2012-03-06). Intellectuals and Society (Kindle Locations 5802-5803). Perseus Books Group. Kindle Edition.

The Vietnam War

. . . Whatever the merits or demerits of the decision of the United States to become a major participant in the war to prevent South Vietnam from being conquered by North Vietnam’s Communist government, the stark fact is that more than 50,000 Americans died winning military victories in Vietnam that ended in political defeat because the climate of opinion created by the intelligentsia in the United States made it politically impossible not only to continue the involvement of American troops in the fighting there, but impossible even to continue to supply the resources needed by the South Vietnam government to defend itself after American troops were withdrawn.

Sowell, Thomas (2012-03-06). Intellectuals and Society (Kindle Locations 5820-5824). Perseus Books Group. Kindle Edition.

Communist leaders themselves, after taking over South Vietnam, openly admitted in later years that they had lost militarily in their war with American troops in Vietnam, including during their Tet offensive, but pointed out that they had won politically in America. During the war itself, American prisoner of war James Stockdale was told by his North Vietnamese captor, “Our country has no capability to defeat you on the battlefield,” but that they expected to “win this war on the streets of New York.”

Legendary Communist military leader General Vo Nguyen Giap, who had defeated the French in the decisive battle of Dien Bien Phu in 1954, and who later commanded North Vietnamese forces against the Americans, said candidly in later years, “We were not strong enough to drive out a half-million American troops, but that wasn’t our aim.” His goal was political: “Our intention was to break the will of the American Government to continue the war. Westmoreland was wrong to expect that his superior firepower would grind us down. If we had focused on the balance of forces, we would have been defeated in two hours.” As it was, the North Vietnamese lost “at least a million” troops killed, mostly by American troops, according to one of General Giap’s aides—a death toll almost 20 times that of the Americans. . . .

A still later interview with a man who had served as a colonel on the staff of the North Vietnamese army, and who had received the surrender of South Vietnam in 1975, told a very similar story. A 1995 interview with Colonel Bui Tin produced these questions and answers:

Q: Was the American antiwar movement important to Hanoi’s victory?

A: It was essential to our strategy. Support for the war from our rear was completely secure while the American rear was vulnerable. Every day our leadership would listen to world news over the radio at

9 a.m. to follow the growth of the American antiwar movement. Visits to Hanoi by people like Jane Fonda and former Attorney General Ramsey Clark and ministers gave us confidence that we should hold on in the face of battlefield reverses. We were elated when Jane Fonda, wearing a red Vietnamese dress, said at a press conference that she was ashamed of American actions in the war and that she would struggle along with us.

Q: Did the Politburo pay attention to these visits?

A: Keenly.

Q: Why?

A: Those people represented the conscience of America. The conscience of America was part of its war-making capability, and we were turning that power in our favor. America lost because of its democracy; through dissent and protest it lost the ability to mobilize a will to win.

Sowell, Thomas (2012-03-06). Intellectuals and Society (Kindle Locations 5831-5855). Perseus Books Group. Kindle Edition.

In the aftermath of the Communist political victory in Vietnam, those in the Western democracies who had opposed American involvement in the Vietnam war on humanitarian grounds, because of the large casualties among civilians and soldiers alike, were now confronted by the fact that the end of the war did not put an end to the casualties. Military historian Victor Davis Hanson observed:

A communist victory brought more death and even greater dislocation to the Vietnamese than did decades of war—more often slowly by starvation, incarceration, and flight, rather than by outright mass murder. . . Exact numbers are in dispute, but most scholars accept that well over 1 million left by boat; and hundreds of thousands of others crossed by land into neighboring Thailand and even China. . . Those who died in leaky boats or in storms numbered between 50,000 and 100,000 . . .

The Vietnam war also saw the revival in America of a pattern seen in France between the two World Wars—the downgrading of soldiers in battle from the role of patriotic heroes, no matter what acts of bravery and self-sacrifice they engaged in. During the Vietnam war, this tendency was carried even further. Collateral damage to Vietnamese civilians during American military operations, or even allegations of individual misconduct by American troops, led to sweeping moral condemnations of the U.S. military as a whole, often without any examination of the question whether such collateral damage was unusual in warfare or unusually extensive, or whether atrocities were authorized or condoned by authorities. The most widely publicized atrocity against civilians—the “My Lai massacre” by an American military unit against a South Vietnamese village that was suspected of harboring Communist guerrillas—was stopped by other American troops when they arrived on the scene, and the officer in charge was court-martialed for things that the Communist guerrillas did routinely and on a vastly larger scale.

A common image of Vietnam veterans was that they were disproportionately the poor, the uneducated, the minorities—and that the trauma of combat drove them to widespread drug usage in Vietnam and to acts of violence upon returning home with “post-traumatic stress syndrome.” Widely hailed motion pictures depicting that era dramatized such images. Hard statistical data, however, contradicted such depictions and some of the Vietnam “combat veterans” featured on television specials by Dan Rather and others later turned out to have never been in combat or never to have been in Vietnam. But what they said fit the vision and that was often enough to get them on television and cited in newspapers and books.

. . . The only Pulitzer Prize awarded for coverage of the Tet offensive went to a reporter who wrote about the My Lai massacre without ever setting foot in Vietnam. This tangential tragedy thus overshadowed innumerable battles across South Vietnam in which American troops won overwhelming

victories. That much of this fighting against urban guerrillas in civilian clothes took place in residential neighborhoods made the task more difficult for American troops but presented the media with numerous opportunities to criticize those troops:

Homes surrounding the track were stuffed with hundreds of snipers. It took a week of house-to-house fighting for American army troops and ARVN [South Vietnamese] forces to locate and expel the Vietcong, who rarely surrendered and had to be killed almost to the last man. Yet on television Americans were being blamed for blasting apart residences, as if no one noticed that urban snipers were shooting marines in the middle of a holiday truce.

Sowell, Thomas (2012-03-06). Intellectuals and Society (Kindle Locations 5893-5926). Perseus Books Group. Kindle Edition.

The Cold War

The general asymmetry of international agreements between democratic and autocratic governments goes back well before the Cold War. Not only do the intelligentsia of democratic countries help create a climate of opinion eager for such agreements and uncritical of their specifics, that same public opinion forces democratic governments to live up to the terms of such agreements, while there is no comparable pressure on autocratic governments. Thus . . . British and American governments restricted the size of their battleships to what was specified in the Washington Naval Agreements of 1921–1922, and the British also did the same as regards the Anglo-German Naval Agreement of 1935—with the net result during the Second World War being that both Japan and Germany had battleships larger than any in the British or American navy, because the totalitarian German and Japanese governments were free to violate those agreements.

Similarly, during the Vietnam war, a cease-fire negotiated in Paris had to be observed by South Vietnam because the South Vietnamese were dependent on American military supplies, and the United States was under the pressure of public opinion to see that the cease-fire was observed. Meanwhile, Communist North Vietnam was free to ignore the agreement that its representative had signed to such international fanfare, which culminated in a Nobel Prize for peace to both North Vietnamese representative Le Duc Tho and American Secretary of State Henry Kissinger.

With North Vietnam free to continue the fighting and South Vietnam inhibited from taking comparable countermeasures, the net result was that North Vietnam conquered South Vietnam.

Once again, the intellectuals' effect on the course of events did not depend on their convincing or influencing the holders of power. President Nixon had no regard for intellectuals. It was by helping shape the climate of public opinion that the intelligentsia influenced Nixon's foreign policy decision, at the cost of abandoning South Vietnam to its fate.

Among the many notions of the 1920s and 1930s that returned in the 1960s was the irrelevant claim that the peoples of all countries desire peace—as if what the German people desired mattered to Hitler or what the Soviet peoples wanted mattered to Stalin. . . .

Sowell, Thomas (2012-03-06). Intellectuals and Society (Kindle Locations 6018-6034). Perseus Books Group. Kindle Edition.

The election of Ronald Reagan as President of the United States in 1980 brought policies and practices directly the opposite of those favored by intellectuals. Instead of emphasizing, as Neville Chamberlain had, the importance of understanding an adversary nation's point of view, President Reagan emphasized the importance of making sure that adversary nations understood the American point of view, as when he called the Soviet Union "an evil empire"—to the consternation of the intelligentsia. In his first meeting with Soviet premier Mikhail Gorbachev in Geneva in 1985, Reagan was

quite blunt: “We won’t stand by and let you maintain weapon superiority over us. We can agree to reduce arms, or we can continue the arms race, which I think you know you can’t win.”

During a visit to West Berlin in 1987, Reagan was told that the Communists in East Berlin had long-range listening devices. This was his response, as recounted in his autobiography:

“Watch what you say,” one German official said. Well, when I heard that, I went out to a landing that was even closer to the building and began sounding off about what I thought of a government that penned in its people like farm animals.

I can’t remember exactly what I said, but I may have used a little profanity in expressing my opinion of Communism, hoping I would be heard.

Later that day, he went to the infamous Berlin Wall, where he made a public statement that stunned the intelligentsia as much as his “evil empire” remark: “Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall!” This was a double insult because, officially at least, it was the sovereign East German government that was responsible for the Berlin Wall. By publicly going over their heads directly to Soviet premier Gorbachev, he was in effect calling the East German regime a puppet government.

Another area in which Ronald Reagan marked a break with past practices of Western leaders was in refusing to make international agreements, when he did not consider the terms right, even if that meant that he came away from a summit meeting empty-handed and would be blamed by the media for not reaching an agreement. At a 1986 summit meeting in Iceland with Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev, there were many tentative agreements on arms reductions but, when time came to finalize an accord, Gorbachev said, “This all depends, of course, on you giving up SDI,” the Strategic Defense Initiative, the missile defense program called “star wars” by its opponents. Later, recalling this sticking point at the eleventh hour in his autobiography, Reagan said:

I was getting angrier and angrier.

I realized he had brought me to Iceland with one purpose: to kill the Strategic Defense Initiative. He must have known from the beginning he was going to bring it up at the last minute.

“The meeting is over,” I said. “Let’s go, George, we’re leaving.”

With that, President Reagan and Secretary of State George Shultz walked out, even though the Soviets had indicated that they were prepared to stay for another day. There would be later summits, but this summit let the Soviets know that Reagan, unlike previous Western leaders, did not feel a need to come away with an agreement at virtually any cost.

The fact that the Reagan approach, which many among the intelligentsia saw as likely to lead to nuclear war, led instead to the end of the Cold War, while the Chamberlain approach that was supposed to lead to peace led instead to the biggest war in history, has made no dent on the vision of the anointed.

Sowell, Thomas (2012-03-06). Intellectuals and Society (Kindle Locations 6044-6074). Perseus Books Group. Kindle Edition.

The Cold War Intelligentsia

Senator Joseph Biden was one of the sponsors of a bill to freeze American military spending in 1984—which, given the rate of inflation, would mean a reduction of military spending in real terms—and, though the bill was defeated, one-third of the Senate voted for it.

Sowell, Thomas (2012-03-06). Intellectuals and Society (Kindle Locations 6104-6106). Perseus Books Group. Kindle Edition.

... resolutions have urged “disarmament agreements that reduce the possibility of war,” urged “that the United States make every effort to strengthen the United Nations to make it a more effective

instrument for world peace,” called for “a halt to the arms race,” and declared that “specific materials need to be developed for use in school classrooms in order to attain goals that focus on the establishment of peace and the understanding of nuclear proliferation.” The idea so much in vogue in the 1920s and 1930s, that war itself was the enemy, not other nations, reappeared in an NEA resolution that declared nuclear war “the common enemy of all nations and peoples.” Trophies were awarded at the NEA’s meetings for schools that created programs to promote pacifism and internationalism, in the name of “peace.”

Sowell, Thomas (2012-03-06). Intellectuals and Society (Kindle Locations 6149-6156). Perseus Books Group. Kindle Edition.

THE IRAQ WARS

Two wars against Iraq, beginning respectively in 1991 and in 2003, were fought under the specter of the Vietnam War, with predictions of another “quagmire” in both cases, though the 1991 war in fact successfully drove Iraq out of Kuwait in short order, with minimal American casualties and devastating losses inflicted on Iraqi armed forces. Tom Wicker of the **New York Times**, for example, in 1990 foresaw “a bloody and ill-conceived war against Iraq,” one with “devastating casualties for United States forces.” Anthony Lewis of the **New York Times** speculated that there might be “20,000 American casualties.” A **Washington Post** writer reported a mathematical model developed at the Brookings Institution that produced an “optimistic” estimate of more than a thousand American deaths in the 1991 Iraq war and a “pessimistic” estimate of more than four thousand deaths. In reality, 148 Americans were killed in combat during the first Iraq war.

The second Iraq war, beginning in 2003, was more like most wars, with unforeseen setbacks and unpredictable side effects, quite aside from debatable issues about the wisdom of the invasion or the nature of its goals. Despite the swift military defeat of the Iraqi armed forces, peace was not restored because of a reign of terror directed in part against American troops, but primarily against Iraqi civilians, by both domestic and foreign terrorists, determined to prevent a very different kind of government from being established in the Middle East under American auspices.

As in the case of the Vietnam war, much of the media and the intelligentsia in general declared what was happening in Iraq to be a “civil war” and “unwinnable,” and many urged the immediate withdrawal of American troops. When instead there was in 2007 an increase in the number of American troops—called a “surge”—in order to suppress the rampant terrorism, this surge was widely condemned in advance as futile by the intelligentsia, in the media and in Congress.

In January 2007, **New York Times** columnist Maureen Dowd dismissed the idea as President Bush’s “nonsensical urge to Surge.” **New York Times** columnist Paul Krugman said: “The only real question about the planned ‘surge’ in Iraq—which is better described as a Vietnam-style escalation—is whether its proponents are cynical or delusional.” In February 2007, the **Washington Post** said: “Mr. Bush’s surge is unlikely to produce a breakthrough toward peace; in fact the violence may continue to worsen.” The **St. Louis Post-Dispatch** said “it’s too little, too late.” An op-ed column in the **Philadelphia Tribune** called the war “unwinnable.” The **New Republic** asked rhetorically: “So who in Washington actually believes this surge will work?” Answering their own question, they said only “one man”—Vice President Dick Cheney. But, they added, “Sooner or later, even for Dick Cheney, reality must intrude.” Even the tone of utter certainty and condescension echoed that of the 1920s and 1930s intelligentsia.

Among those in politics who condemned the surge in advance was a future President of the United States, Senator Barack Obama, who said in January 2007 that the impending surge was “a mistake that I and others will actively oppose in the days to come.” He called the projected surge a “reckless

escalation,” and introduced legislation to begin removal of American troops from Iraq no later than May 1, 2007, “with the goal of removing all United States combat forces from Iraq by March 31, 2008.”

Senator Obama said: “Escalation has already been tried and it has already failed, because no amount of American forces can solve the political differences that lie at the heart of somebody else’s civil war.” Another 20,000 American troops “will not in any imaginable way be able to accomplish any new progress.” Senator Obama was not alone. Senator Edward Kennedy proposed requiring Congressional approval before there could be a surge. Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid and Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi sent a letter to President Bush, cautioning against the surge strategy: “Surging forces is a strategy that you have already tried and that has already failed,” they said, and called the upcoming surge “a serious mistake.” Senator Hillary Clinton was also among those in Congress opposing the surge, and former Senator John Edwards called for an immediate withdrawal of American troops.

A later (2009) Brookings Institution study of fatalities in 2007 among Iraqi civilians—the main target of terrorist attacks—showed such fatalities to have been an estimated 3,500 per month when predictions of failure for the surge were made in January 2007. In the wake of the surge, however, these fatalities fell to 750 per month by the end of the year. Fatalities among American troops in Iraq were 83 per month in January 2007, rose to a peak of 126 per month as military operations against terrorist strongholds increased, but fell to 23 per month by the end of the year, in the wake of the surge.

At the time, however, there was fierce resistance among the intelligentsia to news that the surge was working. In June 2007, the *Los Angeles Times* said that there was “no evidence that the surge is succeeding.” In September 2007, under the title “Snow Job in the Desert,” *New York Times* columnist Paul Krugman lamented the Bush administration’s “remarkable success creating the perception that the ‘surge’ is succeeding, even though there’s not a shred of verifiable evidence to suggest that it is.” *New York Times* columnist Frank Rich declared “The ‘decrease in violence’ fable” to be “insidious.”

Clearly, some people were determined to see this as another “unwinnable” war, another Vietnam. By 2009, however, even the *New York Times* was reporting—though not under banner headlines—that there had been large declines in fatalities among American troops in Iraq, Iraqi security forces and Iraqi civilians, to a fraction of what their fatalities had been two years earlier, before the surge. There had also been an increase in the number of Iraqi security forces and in the country’s electricity output.

While the surge was going on in 2007, however, it was something exceptional when two Brookings Institution scholars, identifying themselves as people who had previously criticized “the Bush administration’s miserable handling of Iraq” nevertheless said after a visit to that country that “we were surprised by the gains we saw and the potential to produce not necessarily ‘victory’ but a sustainable stability that both we and the Iraqis could live with.” Other on-the-scene reports in 2007 likewise revealed substantial success against the terrorists in Iraq and a corresponding return to normalcy in Iraqi society, including a return of Iraqi expatriates who had fled the terrorism, and resident Iraqis who now frequented public places where they had been fearful of going before.

Those who were committed to the view that the war was “unwinnable,” and a surge futile, remained unchanged despite the growing evidence that the surge was working. In September 2007, *New York Times* columnist Paul Krugman said: “To understand what’s really happening in Iraq, follow the oil money, which already knows that the surge has failed.”

Insistence that the surge was a failure only escalated as signs of its success began to appear. As the September 2007 date for General David Petraeus’ report to Congress on the surge which he commanded neared, there were growing outcries in the media and in politics that the general would only try to verbally spin the failure of the surge into success. Senator Dick Durbin, for example, said that “By carefully manipulating the statistics, the Bush-Petraeus report will try to persuade us that violence in

Iraq is decreasing and thus the surge is working.” “We need to stop the surge and start to get our troops out,” said Senator Joseph Biden in August 2007.

These preemptive efforts at discrediting what Petraeus was about to report were climaxed by a full-page advertisement in the *New York Times*, on the day of his report, with a bold headline: “General Petraeus or General Betray Us?” sponsored by the political activist organization MoveOn.org. The subtitle was “Cooking the Books for the White House.” The *New York Times* charged MoveOn.org less than half the usual rate for a full-page ad and waived its policy against ads making personal attacks in advertisements.

In short, General Petraeus was accused of lying before he said anything—and in the face of growing evidence from a number of other sources that in fact the surge had substantially reduced violence in Iraq. The hostile atmosphere in which General Petraeus and U.S. ambassador Ryan Crocker testified before Congress was indicated by an account in *USA Today*:

Following a day-long marathon Monday before two key House committees, they faced some of the Senate’s most celebrated talkers—including five presidential candidates—in back-to-back hearings.

In 10 hours of testimony, the two men got two bathroom breaks and less than 30 minutes for lunch.

During these hearings, Senator Barbara Boxer said to General Petraeus: “I ask you to take off your rosy glasses.” Hillary Clinton said that the general’s report required “the willing suspension of disbelief.” Congressman Rahm Emanuel said that General Petraeus’ report could win “the Nobel Prize for creative statistics or the Pulitzer for fiction.” Congressman Robert Wexler declared that “among unbiased, non-partisan experts, the consensus is stark: The surge has failed.” He compared General Petraeus’ testimony to the discredited testimony of General William Westmoreland during the Vietnam war. The same comparison was made by Frank Rich of the *New York Times*, who asserted that there were “some eerie symmetries between General Petraeus’s sales pitch” and “Gen. William Westmoreland’s similar mission for L.B.J.” This was just one of the signs that the ghost of the Vietnam war still loomed over later wars. Even the tactics of opponents of the Vietnam war reappeared in many places. According to *USA Today*: “The testimony was punctuated by anti-war hecklers who rose one by one to shout slogans such as, “Generals lie, children die.”

Eventually, claims that the surge had failed as predicted faded away amid increasingly undeniable evidence that it had succeeded. But, far from causing a re-evaluation of the prevailing vision that had been so strident and so discredited by events, the success of the surge simply led to shrinking coverage of news from Iraq in much of the media.

Sowell, Thomas (2012-03-06). Intellectuals and Society (Kindle Locations 6193-6284). Perseus Books Group. Kindle Edition.

Another throwback to the Vietnam war era was the highly publicized “combat veteran” who proclaimed his opposition to the war—and who later turned out not to have been a combat veteran at all. As the *New York Times* reported, after the truth about one of these “combat veterans” came out belatedly:

The thick-muscled man with close-cropped hair who called himself Rick Duncan seemed right out of central casting as a prop for a Democratic candidate running against Bush administration policies last fall.

A former Marine Corps captain who suffered brain trauma from a roadside bomb in Iraq and was at the Pentagon during the Sept. 11 attacks. An advocate for veterans rights who opposed the war. An Annapolis graduate who was proudly gay. With his gold-plated credentials, he commanded the respect and attention of not just politicians, but also police chiefs, reporters and veterans advocates for the better part of two years.

Yet, except for his first name, virtually none of his story was true.

That this man's easily checked lies passed muster in the media for two years suggests once again the receptivity of the intelligentsia to things that fit their vision, however unsubstantiated those things might be otherwise.

During the second Iraq war, the American intelligentsia repeated the patterns of the intelligentsia in France between the two World Wars—namely, the verbal reduction of combat soldiers from the status of patriotic heroes to that of pitiable victims. Even stories about the financial problems of reservists called away from their jobs to go on active duty in Iraq, or stories about the simple fact of sad goodbyes to friends or family members in the military being sent overseas, made the front pages of the *New York Times*, while stories about the heroism of American troops in combat either went unreported or appeared on inside pages. Stories of extraordinary bravery of Americans under fire that won Congressional Medals of Honor—including men throwing themselves on enemy hand grenades, sacrificing their own lives to save the lives of those around them—were reported on pages 13 and 14, respectively, and one in the second section of the *New York Times*. The *Washington Post* and the Los Angeles Times similarly buried these stories of extraordinary heroism on the inside pages and much of television news followed suit, either downplaying or completely ignoring such stories.

Negative stories, on the other hand, found instant prominence in the media, even when unsubstantiated. For example, much outrage was expressed in the media during the early days of the Iraq war when a claim was made that looters had pillaged precious artifacts from an Iraqi museum, which American soldiers had failed to protect. That men fighting, with their lives on the line, were supposed to divert their attention to protecting museums was a remarkable enough premise. But the charge itself turned out to be false. The artifacts in question had been secreted by the museum staff, in order to protect them from looters and from the dangers of war. Yet the media had not waited to substantiate the charges against the American military before bursting into print with these charges and bursting with indignation over them.

The American military's positive achievements in general, whether in battle or in restoring civil order or carrying out humanitarian activities, received little attention in the media. While the Iraq war began to disappear from the front pages of the *New York Times* as terrorist attacks declined in the wake of the surge, and coverage shrank similarly in other media, American casualties continued to be highlighted, even when those casualties were in single digits, and the cumulative casualties were constantly featured, even though these casualties were by no means high compared to other wars. In fact, all the Americans killed in the two Iraq wars put together were fewer than those killed taking the one island of Iwo Jima during the Second World War or one day of fighting at Antietam during the Civil War.

Unless one believes that wars can be fought with no casualties, there was nothing unusual about the casualty rate in the first or second Iraq war, except for its being lower than in most wars. . . . When the New York Times published photographs of dying and dead American soldiers in Iraq, executive editor Bill Keller declared that “death and carnage are part of the story, and to launder them out of our account of the war would be a disservice.” Such verbal virtuosity creates a straw man of “laundering out” the fact of deaths in war—which no one has ever doubted—and equates publishing photos of individual soldiers in the throes of death with just telling the story, while burying stories of soldiers' heroism deep inside the paper.

The same depiction of soldiers as victims dominated news stories of veterans returning home from combat. Problems of returning veterans, such as alcoholism or homelessness, were featured in the media, with no attempt to compare the incidence of such problems to the incidence of the same problems among the civilian population. In other words, if all returning veterans were not completely immune to the problems that civilians experienced, that was presented as if it were a special problem brought on by military service. A front page article in the *New York Times* of January 13, 2008, for example, featured killings in the United States by veterans returning from the wars in Iraq and

Afghanistan. “In many of those cases,” it said, “combat trauma and the stress of deployment” were among the factors which “appear to have set the stage for a tragedy that was part destruction, part self-destruction.”

This particular attempt to picture veterans as victims failed to compare the homicide rate of returning veterans with the homicide rate among civilians of the same ages. Had they done so, it was pointed out in the *New York Post*, they would have found that the homicide rate among returning veterans was one-fifth that among civilians of the same ages. Undaunted, the New York Times returned to the same theme in a front-page story a year later, in 2009—again going into gory details in individual cases, with no mention of the rate of homicides among military veterans compared to civilians of the same ages.

Another promotion of the image of victimhood among military veterans was a story about suicide rates in the military having reached “the highest since the Army began keeping records,” as the *New York Times* put it, in a story echoed throughout the media. Yet, once again, there was no comparison with suicide rates among people of the same demographic characteristics in the civilian population—which was *higher* than among people in the military, as the Associated Press reported, but which few media outlets mentioned. Once again, much of the media filtered out facts that went against their vision, leaving their readers with a wholly distorted picture. Like *The Times* of London in the 1930s, the *New York Times* in a later era took the lead in filtering and slanting news to fit its vision.

Sowell, Thomas (2012-03-06). Intellectuals and Society (Kindle Locations 6292-6350). Perseus Books Group. Kindle Edition.

PATRIOTISM AND NATIONAL HONOR

. . . When Hitler launched an invasion of France in 1940, against the advice of his top generals, it was because he was convinced that contemporary France was lacking in these supposedly irrelevant qualities—and the sudden collapse of the French, despite their military advantages, suggests that these qualities are indeed consequential.

Sowell, Thomas (2012-03-06). Intellectuals and Society (Kindle Locations 6380-6383). Perseus Books Group. Kindle Edition.

PART VII — INTELLECTUALS AND RACE

Chapter 16 — Disparities and Their Causes

THE PROGRESSIVE ERA

. . . the same **general** vision of society prevailed among those who called themselves Progressives at the beginning of the twentieth century and those who called themselves liberals later in that century, however disparate their views on race were between these two eras. Theirs was the vision of the anointed as surrogate decision-makers in both periods, along with such corollaries as an expanded role for government and an expanded role for judges to re-interpret the Constitution, so as to loosen its restrictions on the powers of government.

Sowell, Thomas (2012-03-06). Intellectuals and Society (Kindle Locations 6562-6565). Perseus Books Group. Kindle Edition.

. . . H.H. Goddard, who had administered mental tests to immigrant children on Ellis Island, declared: “These people cannot deal with abstractions.” Another giant of the mental-testing profession, L.M. Terman, author of the Stanford-Binet I.Q. test and creator of a decades-long study of people with I.Q.s of 140 and above, likewise concluded from his study of racial minorities in the Southwest that children from such groups “cannot master abstractions.” It was widely accepted as more or less a matter of course during this era that blacks were incapable of mental performances comparable to whites, and the Army mental test results were taken as confirmation.

The Progressive era was also the heyday of eugenics, the attempt to prevent excessive breeding of the “wrong” kind of people—including, though not limited to, particular races. Eugenicists feared that people of lower mental capacity would reproduce on a larger scale than others, and thus over time bring about a decline in the average I.Q. in the nation. The **New Republic** lamented “the multiplication of the unfit, the production of a horde of unwanted souls.”

In Britain, as in the United States, leaders and supporters of the eugenics movement included people on the left, such as John Maynard Keynes, who helped create the Cambridge Eugenics Society, as well as H.G. Wells, George Bernard Shaw, Harold Laski, Sidney Webb and Julian Huxley. Sidney Webb said, “as a nation we are breeding largely from our inferior stocks.” But eugenics was by no means exclusively a movement on the left, nor one without opponents on the left. Supporters of eugenics also included conservatives, among them both Neville Chamberlain and Winston Churchill.

In America, among those to whom pioneer birth-control advocate Margaret Sanger took her message was the Ku Klux Klan. Madison Grant’s book **The Passing of the Great Race**, expressing fears of a loss of hegemony by whites in general and Nordics in particular, was a landmark book of its era. It was not only a best seller in the United States, it was translated into French, Norwegian and—most fatefully—German. Hitler called it his “Bible.”

Sowell, Thomas (2012-03-06). Intellectuals and Society (Kindle Locations 6569-6587). Perseus Books Group. Kindle Edition.

What **The Passing of the Great Race** did have was a great display of erudition, or apparent erudition, using numerous technical terms unfamiliar to most people—“brachycephalic skulls,” “Armenoids,” “Paleolithic man,” the “Massagetæ,” “Zendavesta,” the “Aryan Tokharian language,” and the “Miocene” and “Pliocene” eras, as well as such statements as “The Upper Paleolithic embraces all

the postglacial stages down to the Neolithic and includes the subdivisions of the Aurignacian, Solutrean, Magdalenian and Azilian.” But this all served as an impressive backdrop for unrelated conclusions.

Sowell, Thomas (2012-03-06). Intellectuals and Society (Kindle Locations 6597-6604). Perseus Books Group. Kindle Edition.

That ***The Passing of the Great Race*** was taken seriously says much about the times. But Madison Grant was by no means a fringe crank or an ignorant redneck. He was born into a wealthy family in New York City and was educated at Yale and the Columbia University law school. He was a member of numerous exclusive social clubs. Politically, he was a Progressive and an activist on issues important to Progressives, such as conservation, endangered species, municipal reform and the creation of national parks, as well as being a driving force behind the creation of the world’s largest zoo in the Bronx. ***The Passing of the Great Race*** was recommended not only in a popular publication like ***The Saturday Evening Post*** but was also reviewed in *Science*, published by the American Association for the Advancement of Science.

Sowell, Thomas (2012-03-06). Intellectuals and Society (Kindle Locations 6618-6625). Perseus Books Group. Kindle Edition.

Richard T. Ely was not only a Progressive during the Progressive era, he espoused the kinds of ideas that defined the Progressive era, years before that era began. He rejected free market economics and saw government power as something to be applied “to the amelioration of the conditions under which people live or work.” Far from seeing government intervention as a reduction of freedom, he redefined freedom, so that the “regulation by the power of the state of these industrial and other social relations existing among men is a condition of freedom.” . . .

Sowell, Thomas (2012-03-06). Intellectuals and Society (Kindle Locations 6680-6684). Perseus Books Group. Kindle Edition.

Eugenics, however, was not confined to trying to reduce the reproduction of particular races. Many of its advocates targeted also people of the sort whom Harvard economist Frank Taussig called “those saturated with alcohol or tainted with hereditary disease,” as well as “the irretrievable criminals and tramps.” If it was not feasible to “chloroform them once and for all,” Professor Taussig said, then “at least they can be segregated, shut up in refuges and asylums, and prevented from propagating their kind.” In Sweden in later years, Nobel Prizewinning economist Gunnar Myrdal supported programs which sterilized 60,000 people from 1941 through 1975.

Sowell, Thomas (2012-03-06). Intellectuals and Society (Kindle Locations 6699-6704). Perseus Books Group. Kindle Edition.

In the early 1920s, Lorimer assigned novelist and future Pulitzer Prize winner Kenneth L. Roberts to write a series of articles on immigration for the *Saturday Evening Post*. In one of these articles Roberts referred to “the better-class Northern and Western Europeans” who “are particularly fine types of immigrants,” as contrasted with “the queer, alien, mongrelized people of Southeastern Europe.” These articles were later republished as a book titled *Why Europe Leaves Home*. In this book, Roberts said, among other things, “the Jews of Poland are human parasites,” that people from the Austro-Hungarian Empire were “inconceivably backward.” He added:

The American nation was founded and developed by the Nordic race, but if a few more million members of the Alpine, Mediterranean and Semitic races are poured among us, the result must inevitably be a hybrid race of people as worthless and futile as the good-for-nothing mongrels of Central America and Southeastern Europe.

Sowell, Thomas (2012-03-06). Intellectuals and Society (Kindle Locations 6772-6781). Perseus Books Group. Kindle Edition.

Chapter 19 — Race and Cosmic Justice

SLAVERY

It is the image of *racial* slavery—white people enslaving black people—that has been indelibly burned into the consciousness of both black and white Americans today by the intelligentsia—and not simply as a fact about the past but as a *causal* factor used to explain much of the present, and an enduring *moral* condemnation of the enslaving race. Yet two crucial facts have been filtered out of this picture: (1) the institution of slavery was not based on race and (2) whites as well as blacks were enslaved. The very word “slave” is derived from the name of a European people—Slavs—who were enslaved for centuries before the first African was brought in bondage to the Western Hemisphere. It was not only in English that the word for slave derived from the word for Slav; the same was true in various other European languages and in Arabic.

For most of the history of slavery, which covers most of the history of the human race, most slaves were not racially different from those who enslaved them. Not only did Europeans enslave other Europeans, Asians enslaved other Asians, Africans enslaved other Africans, Polynesians enslaved other Polynesians and the indigenous peoples of the Western Hemisphere enslaved other indigenous peoples of the Western Hemisphere.

Sowell, Thomas (2012-03-06). Intellectuals and Society (Kindle Locations 8247-8257). Perseus Books Group. Kindle Edition.

The fact that so many black families today consist of women with fatherless children has been said by many to be a legacy of slavery. Yet most black children grew up in two-parent families, even under slavery itself, and for generations thereafter. As recently as 1960, two-thirds of black children were still living in two-parent families. A century ago, a slightly higher percentage of blacks were married than were whites. In some years, a slightly higher percentage of blacks were in the labor force than were whites. In 1890 and in 1930, the unemployment rate for blacks was lower than it was for whites. The reasons for changes for the worse in these and other patterns must be sought in our own times. Whatever the reasons for the disintegration of the black family, it escalated to the current disastrous level well over a century after the end of slavery, though less than a generation after a large expansion of the welfare state and its accompanying non-judgmental ideology.

Sowell, Thomas (2012-03-06). Intellectuals and Society (Kindle Locations 8277-8286). Perseus Books Group. Kindle Edition.

PART VIII — AN OVERVIEW

Chapter 20 — Patterns and Visions

INTELLECTUAL STANDARDS

One of the most common violations of intellectual standards by intellectuals has been the practice of attributing an emotion (racism, sexism, homophobia, xenophobia, etc.) to those whose views differ from theirs, rather than answering their arguments. . . .

Sowell, Thomas (2012-03-06). Intellectuals and Society (Kindle Locations 8457-8459). Perseus Books Group. Kindle Edition.

Another common tactic and flaw in the arguments of the intelligentsia is ***eternalizing the transient***. Thus statistical trends in the share of the nation’s income going to “the rich” (however defined) and “the poor” (however defined), treat the people in these different income brackets as if they are enduring residents in those brackets, despite all evidence that the turnover includes most of the people in these brackets, due to the mundane fact that most people begin their careers at the bottom and progress upward.

Sowell, Thomas (2012-03-06). Intellectuals and Society (Kindle Locations 8462-8466). Perseus Books Group. Kindle Edition. . . .

. . . The ability to wave aside realities with the turn of a phrase is one of the most dangerous talents of the intelligentsia.

The arsenal of evasion ranges from “simplistic” to “blaming the victim” to “no panacea” to “mean-spirited,” “racist,” “sexist,” “homophobic,” and differential caring, as in Andrew Hacker’s statement, “conservatives don’t really care whether black Americans are happy or unhappy.” More sophisticated evasions include the argument that there is no argument—that “science” has already proved something, whether what science is supposed to have proved is the genetic inequality of races or catastrophic consequences from man-made global warming. Related to this is the notion that some statements are simply “hate speech,” rather than alternative views, and are therefore to be banned and sanctioned, as is common on academic campuses, the institutions most under the direct control of intellectuals.

Sowell, Thomas (2012-03-06). Intellectuals and Society (Kindle Locations 8492-8499). Perseus Books Group. Kindle Edition.

Filtering out discordant facts in the media and refusing to release raw data on which some favored conclusion has been reached—whether about the supposed success of affirmative action in college admissions or the conclusiveness of the case for catastrophic global warming—are all part of the pattern of preempting issues rather than confronting them.

Filtering can distort reality, not only in what it presents to the general public, but also in what it presents to the filterers themselves. While each filterer knows what part of reality he has suppressed, what each filterer cannot know is what part of reality innumerable like-minded peers around the world have suppressed, and therefore how valid or invalid are the empirical bases for his own general conclusions, which in turn prompted his decision to engage in filtering out particular parts of reality.

If there really was a coordinated conspiracy to deceive the public, then at least the conspirators themselves would know what was true and what was false. But, when there is instead devotion to a vision, and uncoordinated individual efforts to defend and sustain that vision, none of the individuals involved in that effort may be aware of how much of their own beliefs are based on the falsehoods or

filtering of facts by similarly disposed peers. . . . In short, filterers can deceive each other as well as they deceive the public, adding painful contemporary relevance to the adage, “Oh, what a tangled web we weave, when first we practice to deceive.”

Sowell, Thomas (2012-03-06). Intellectuals and Society (Kindle Locations 8511-8523). Perseus Books Group. Kindle Edition.

One of the most effective ways of evading opposing views has been simply putting the burden of proof on others. What does the phrase “**glass ceiling**” mean, except that no visible evidence is necessary to support the conclusion that a dearth of women above some occupational level is due to discrimination, rather than to innumerable other factors that are involved?²⁹ What does “disparate impact” mean, except that it is presumptively the particular criterion used to judge and select people which creates a false appearance of differences in capabilities among people, when there is no real or relevant difference between the people themselves? Similarly, the benefits of “diversity” need only be asserted, reiterated and insisted upon—but never demonstrated or even illustrated empirically, much less proved.

The simplicity, not to say crudeness, of some of these many ways of evading the responsibility of substantive engagement with opposing arguments is not only striking in itself but is even more striking in its success, especially among those who consider themselves to be “thinking people.” Merely saying words like “diversity,” “glass ceiling” or “disparate impact” banishes any need for evidence to supplement the peer consensus which produces automatic responses not unlike those of Pavlov’s dog.

Sowell, Thomas (2012-03-06). Intellectuals and Society (Kindle Locations 8545-8554). Perseus Books Group. Kindle Edition.

Chapter 21 — Initiatives and Constraints

THE SUPPLY OF PUBLIC INTELLECTUALS

Many of the leading intellectuals in America . . . called for a vote for the Communist Party of the United States in 1932, and many internationally renowned intellectuals in Western democracies in general were throughout the 1930s holding up the Soviet Union as a favorable contrast to American capitalism, and a model for the world—the “moral top of the world” in renowned literary critic Edmund Wilson’s words⁶—at a time when people were literally starving to death by the millions in the Soviet Union and many others were being shipped off to slave labor camps. A learned scholar like professor Harold Laski spent years denouncing military equipment producers in Britain, who were all that stood between him and dehumanization and extermination in a Nazi concentration camp.

More fundamentally, there is no reason to adopt the criteria of the intellectuals for rankings among themselves as criteria for evaluating the validity or value of what they say for society at large. Academic intellectuals, especially, are evaluated according to whether their ideas are original, rather than—the ultimate putdown—“derivative.” But Edmund Burke said, “I do not aim at singularity.” He added: “I give you opinions which have been accepted amongst us, from very early times to this moment, with a continued and general approbation, and which indeed are so worked into my mind, that I am unable to distinguish what I have learned from others from the results of my own meditation.” He was openly proclaiming his ideas to be derivative but was putting those ideas forth as valid for the real world, rather than as enhancements of his own reputation.

Sowell, Thomas (2012-03-06). Intellectuals and Society (Kindle Locations 8624-8636). Perseus Books Group. Kindle Edition.

Today, when blacks are often treated by the intelligentsia as mascots du jour, black students beating up Asian students in schools in New York and Philadelphia *for years* is simply not an issue that either the media or academia want to discuss, much less an issue to arouse moral outrage. Had these been Hispanic students, for example, being beaten up by white students, cries of outrage would no doubt have rung out across the land from those in the media, in academia and in politics. There is no principle involved in these inconsistencies, but simply the fact that some groups happen to be in vogue among intellectuals at a particular time and other groups are not—and that peer consensus carries great weight, even among individuals with high intellects who consider themselves to be “thinking people.”

Sowell, Thomas (2012-03-06). Intellectuals and Society (Kindle Locations 8668-8673). Perseus Books Group. Kindle Edition.

A Sense of Mission

Among those with a sense of mission are those who teach the young, whether teachers in the schools or professors in colleges and universities. Those among the academics or school teachers who lack either the inclination or the talent to become public intellectuals can instead vent their opinions in the classroom to a captive audience of students, operating in a smaller arena but in a setting with little chance of serious challenge. In such settings, their aggregate influence on the mindset of a generation may be out of all proportion to their competence—not simply in what they directly impart, but more fundamentally in habituating their students to reaching sweeping conclusions after hearing only one side of an issue and then either venting their emotions or springing into action, whether by writing letters to public officials as part of classroom assignments or taking part in other, more direct, activism. In these cases as well, there are few, if any, constraints beforehand and no accountability for the consequences afterwards.

Sowell, Thomas (2012-03-06). Intellectuals and Society (Kindle Locations 8789-8796). Perseus Books Group. Kindle Edition.

. . . teachers are unaccountable for the consequences, either to the students or to the society. For example, when the long downward trend in teenage pregnancy and venereal disease suddenly reversed after the attitude-changing exercises known as “sex education” were introduced into American schools in the 1960s,¹⁷ it was the parents who were left to pick up the pieces when a teenage daughter became pregnant or an adolescent son caught some venereal disease. No teacher had to pay anything toward the financial costs or to lose a moment’s sleep over what had happened in these young people’s personal lives, and verbal virtuosity enabled the changed values which “sex education” promoted to not only escape censure but even to continue to foster the impression that what was called “sex education” was the solution, even when it turned out empirically to be an aggravation of the problem.

Sowell, Thomas (2012-03-06). Intellectuals and Society (Kindle Locations 8802-8808). Perseus Books Group. Kindle Edition.

. . . have been encouraged or recruited to take stands on complex policy issues ranging up to and including policies concerning nuclear weapons, on which whole classes have been assigned to write to members of Congress or to the President of the United States. College admissions committees can give weight to various forms of environmentalism or other activism in considering which applicants to admit, and it is common for colleges to require “community service” as a prerequisite for applicants to be considered at all—with the admissions committee arbitrarily defining what is to be considered a “community service,” as if, for example, it is unambiguously clear that aiding and abetting vagrancy (“the homeless”) is a service rather than a disservice to a community.

In these and other ways, intellectual prerequisites for reaching serious policy conclusions are, ironically, undermined by the intelligentsia themselves. In short, at all levels of the intelligentsia, and in a wide range of specialties, the incentives tend to reward going beyond whatever expertise the particular members of the intelligentsia may have, and the constraints against falsity are few or non-existent. It is not that most of the intelligentsia deliberately lie in a cynical attempt to gain notoriety or to advance themselves or their cause in other ways. However, the general ability of people to rationalize to themselves, as well as to others, is certainly not lacking among the intelligentsia.

Sowell, Thomas (2012-03-06). Intellectuals and Society (Kindle Locations 8811-8821). Perseus Books Group. Kindle Edition.

Constraints

Unlike engineers, physicians, or scientists, the intelligentsia face no serious constraint or sanction based on empirical verification. None could be sued for malpractice, for example, for having contributed to the hysteria over the insecticide DDT, which led to its banning in many countries around the world, costing the lives of literally millions of people through a resurgence of malaria. By contrast, doctors whose actions have had a far more tenuous connection with the medical complications suffered by their patients have had to pay millions of dollars in damages—illustrating once again a fundamental difference between the circumstances of the intelligentsia and the circumstances of people in other mentally demanding professions.

Even the liability of journalists under the laws against slander and libel has been reduced almost to the vanishing point in the case of slandered or libeled individuals who are considered to be “public figures.” Yet, in terms of social consequences, slander or libel against individuals holding or aspiring to high government offices harms the general public as well as the particular individuals who are targeted. If voters are persuaded to abandon someone whom they were otherwise prepared to vote for, as a

result of false charges spread by the media, that is as harmful as any other voter fraud. If nominees to be federal judges, including Supreme Court justices, can find their nominations derailed by false charges of racism or sexual harassment spread by the media, that can deprive the public not only of the services of those particular individuals but also the services of many others later, who refuse to jeopardize their reputations, built up over a lifetime, by entering a confirmation process where reckless and inflammatory accusations, spread nationwide through the media, have become the norm and proving oneself innocent is virtually impossible.

Sowell, Thomas (2012-03-06). Intellectuals and Society (Kindle Locations 8827-8840). Perseus Books Group. Kindle Edition.

Chapter 22 — The Influence of Intellectuals

THE NATURE OF INTELLECTUALS' INFLUENCE

While the kinds of ideas prevalent among today's intellectuals have a long pedigree that reaches back at least as far as the eighteenth century, the *predominance* of those ideas in both intellectual circles and in the society at large, through their influence in the educational system, the media, the courts and in politics, is a much more recent phenomenon. As just one factor, a number of occupations that did not require years of academic training now do. In times past lawyers, for example, did not have to have studied in law schools but could study law on their own, as Abraham Lincoln and many others did. What that means, not only for lawyers but for people in many other occupations, is that the price of their professional training is spending years as a captive audience for academic intellectuals promoting the vision of the anointed.

This is not to say that intellectuals had no influence at all in earlier eras, but in previous centuries there were fewer intellectuals and far fewer of their penumbra among the intelligentsia to carry their ideas into the schools, the media, the courts and the political arena. In earlier times, they had not yet acquired the ability to filter out what information and ideas reach the public through the media and through the educational system, or what ideas would become the touchstone of advanced thinking in the courts.

Sowell, Thomas (2012-03-06). Intellectuals and Society (Kindle Locations 8912-8922). Perseus Books Group. Kindle Edition.

. . . the intellectuals' vision of the world—as it is and as it should be—remains the prevailing vision.

Not since the days of the divine right of kings has there been such a presumption of a right to direct others and constrain their decisions, largely through expanded powers of government. Everything from economic central planning to environmentalism epitomizes the belief that third party elites know best and should be empowered to over-ride the decisions of others. This includes preventing children from growing up with the values taught them by their parents if different—and presumptively more “advanced”—values are preferred by those who teach in the schools and colleges.

We have already seen how Ronald Dworkin declared, “a more equal society is a better society even if its citizens prefer inequality.” In a similar vein, Simone de Beauvoir said, “No woman should be authorized to stay at home to raise her children. Society should be totally different. Women should not have that choice, precisely because if there is such a choice, too many women will make that one. Even earlier, as noted in Chapter 6, Woodrow Wilson as an academic saw his job to be “to make the young gentlemen of the rising generation as unlike their fathers as possible.”

Sowell, Thomas (2012-03-06). Intellectuals and Society (Kindle Locations 8942-8952). Perseus Books Group. Kindle Edition.

We have seen in Chapter 2 how the warnings of a retired police commissioner were not only dismissed but ridiculed at a conference of judges and law professors. Very similar attitudes can prevail among the anointed in different contexts. For example, the publisher of the *New York Times* “told a crowd of people that alienating older white male readers meant ‘we’re doing something right,’ and if they were *not* complaining, ‘it would be an indication that we were not succeeding.’”

One of the many arrogant assumptions of the intelligentsia is that outsiders have to bring meaning into the lives of ordinary people, mobilize them behind some common cause and give them a sense of importance. But anyone who thinks that a mother is not important to a child or a child to a mother has no understanding of human beings. There are few things as important to lovers as each other. Most

people already have someone to whom they are enormously important and whose lives would never be the same without them. That such people may seem unimportant to intellectuals says more about intellectuals than about them. And to project that sense of their unimportance onto the people themselves is one of the many violations of fundamental intellectual standards by intellectuals.

The importance that matters to the intelligentsia is *invidious* importance, publicly displayed importance to strangers. But a mother's sense of her importance to her child, and the child to her, is in no way diminished by the fact that this is an importance within the confines of the family, or that there are millions of other mothers elsewhere with millions of other children who feel the same way. If anything, that sense of purpose and importance may be enhanced by the knowledge that motherhood is a role whose importance has been recognized around the world and over the centuries. Mothers do not need intellectuals to bring meaning into their lives or to give them some public benediction. Lovers are even less likely to want the attention of third parties.

Sowell, Thomas (2012-03-06). Intellectuals and Society (Kindle Locations 8977-8992). Perseus Books Group. Kindle Edition.

INTELLECTUALS AND POLITICIANS

If the internal dangers to a free society arose only from individuals "of towering genius," those dangers might not be as great as they are today. But towering *presumptions* of genius can drive both politicians and intellectuals to undermine or destroy the institutions and norms of the existing society, precisely because these are the *existing* norms of the *existing* society, and ambitious politicians—like intellectuals—want to create different norms and a different society, even if that means sacrificing other people's freedom. In this, some politicians are not only like intellectuals in the incentives they respond to, but may also share the same vision of the anointed as the intellectuals and likewise treat its principles and beliefs as axioms rather than hypotheses. A coalescing of a political leader bent on remaking a free society to fit a vision widely shared among the intelligentsia can bring together the ingredients of a "perfect storm" that a free society may or may not be able to survive.

Sowell, Thomas (2012-03-06). Intellectuals and Society (Kindle Locations 9095-9102). Perseus Books Group. Kindle Edition.

THE TRACK RECORD OF INTELLECTUALS

What have the intellectuals actually done for society—and at what cost?

The areas in which we have seen great advances—science, industry, and medicine, for example—are largely areas outside the scope and influence of intellectuals, as the term has been used here. In areas more within the scope and influence of the intelligentsia, such as education, politics and the law, we have seen significant, and even dangerous, retrogressions.

Beginning in the 1960s, in the wake of "innovative" and "exciting" new educational theories by the intelligentsia, test scores went down in American schools, despite greatly increased spending per student. Also beginning in the 1960s, the previous decades-long decline in the murder rate reversed dramatically and tripled in the wake of the intelligentsia's new theories about crime being applied in the courts. Similarly, downward trends in sexually transmitted diseases and teenage pregnancy reversed dramatically in the 1960s, as indoctrination programs that the intelligentsia called "sex education" spread through the schools. The black family, which had survived centuries of slavery and generations of discrimination, began disintegrating disastrously in the wake of welfare state policies and corresponding non-judgmental social doctrines promoted by the intelligentsia.

Many great advances in medicine, science, and technology have come out of the universities, research institutes, and industrial development departments of businesses, benefitting society at large

and ultimately people around the world. Many of these benefits have been produced by individuals of extraordinary mental abilities, as well as other valuable qualities—but seldom have these individuals been intellectuals in our sense of people whose end products are ideas whose only validation process is the approval of peers. What is striking about intellectuals in this sense is how difficult it is to think of benefits they have conferred on anyone outside their own circles—and how painfully apparent it is how much they have in fact cost the rest of society at large, not only economically but in many other ways, including vulnerability to external enemies bent on these societies' destruction.

While virtually anyone can name a list of medical, scientific, or technological things that have made the lives of today's generation better in some way than that of people in the past, including people just one generation ago, it would be a challenge for even a highly informed person to name three ways in which our lives today are better as a result of the ideas of sociologists or deconstructionists. One could, of course, define "better" as being aware of sociology, deconstruction, etc., or carrying out their policy agendas, but this circular reasoning would amount to just another of the many arguments without arguments.

Sowell, Thomas (2012-03-06). Intellectuals and Society (Kindle Locations 9104-9124). Perseus Books Group. Kindle Edition.

There is an old saying that even a clock that is stopped is nevertheless right twice a day. Intellectuals can claim credit for largely supporting the American civil rights revolution of the 1960s but much of the credit must go to others who put themselves in danger in the South or who put their political careers on the line for the sake of civil rights, beginning with President Harry Truman in the 1940s, in order to make the legal changes which began the breaking down of state-sponsored racial discrimination. Moreover, whatever contributions the intelligentsia made as regards racial progress in the latter half of the twentieth century must be balanced off against the role of Progressive era intellectuals in promoting racial discrimination and even, in the case of Madison Grant, providing a rationale for Hitler's racial beliefs that ended in genocide.

Sowell, Thomas (2012-03-06). Intellectuals and Society (Kindle Locations 9137-9142). Perseus Books Group. Kindle Edition.

SOCIAL COHESION

One of the things intellectuals have been doing for a very long time is loosening the bonds that hold a society together. They have sought to replace the groups into which people have sorted themselves with groupings created and imposed by the intelligentsia. Ties of family, religion, and patriotism, for example, have long been treated as suspect or detrimental by the intelligentsia, while new ties that intellectuals have promoted, such as class—and more recently "gender"—have been projected as either more real or more important. . . .

Sowell, Thomas (2012-03-06). Intellectuals and Society (Kindle Locations 9157-9160). Perseus Books Group. Kindle Edition.

The tendency of intellectuals toward extreme and dramatic explanations of social phenomena—genetic determinism or social injustice, for example—can create alternatives which are each intolerable to believers in the other alternative. Large economic differences, whether among individuals or groups in a given country or among nations, have at various times and places been attributed to innate inferiority among those who are poorer, and at other times and places have been attributed to injustice and exploitation by those who are more prosperous. Given the alternatives proposed, those who are less prosperous have been confronted with either believing themselves inferior or hating those who are more prosperous, and hence guilty of making them poor. Those who are more prosperous are

confronted with either accepting that guilt or denouncing the poor—if they accept the visions that prevailed among intellectuals during the early or the later twentieth century.

Sowell, Thomas (2012-03-06). Intellectuals and Society (Kindle Locations 9162-9169). Perseus Books Group. Kindle Edition.

. . . it is by no means uncommon for some among the intelligentsia to depict the United States as being on trial and needing to prove its innocence—a standard seldom applied to other countries—before it can claim the public’s allegiance in its defense against other nations, . . .

Sowell, Thomas (2012-03-06). Intellectuals and Society (Kindle Locations 9191-9193). Perseus Books Group. Kindle Edition.

ANTI-INTELLECTUAL INTELLECTUALS

After one of their ideas or policies is adopted, the intelligentsia almost never ask the follow-up question: What has gotten better as a result? . . .

Sowell, Thomas (2012-03-06). Intellectuals and Society (Kindle Locations 9252-9253). Perseus Books Group. Kindle Edition.

IMPLICATIONS

The revealed preference of the intelligentsia—whether the specific subject is crime, economics or other things—is not only to be conspicuously different from society at large but also, and almost axiomatically, superior to society, either intellectually or morally, or both. Their vision of the world is not only a vision of causation in the world as it exists and a vision of what the world ought to be like, it is also a vision of **themselves** as a self-anointed vanguard, leading toward that better world.

This vision of the anointed represents a huge investment of ego in a particular set of beliefs, and this investment is a major obstacle to reconsideration of those beliefs in the light of evidence and experience. No one likes to admit being wrong but few have such a large personal investment in a set of beliefs as those with the vision of the anointed—or so few countervailing incentives to reconsider. The ruthlessness with which the anointed assail others and the doggedness with which they cling to their beliefs, in defiance of ever mounting evidence against the “root causes” of crime and other social theories, for example, is evidence of that large ego investment in a set of beliefs about social or political issues that also involve beliefs about themselves.

Intellectuals have no monopoly on dogmatism or ego, or on the power to rationalize. But the institutional constraints facing people in many other fields, from science to athletics, confront others with high and often ruinous costs for persisting in ideas that turn out not to work in practice. . . .

No such inescapable constraints confront people whose end products are ideas, and whose ideas face only the validation of like-minded peers. That is especially the case with academic intellectuals, who control their own institutions and select their own colleagues and successors. No tenured professor can be fired because he or she voted for campus policies that turned out to be either economically or educationally disastrous for the college or university, or advocated policies that turned out to be catastrophic for society as a whole. This unaccountability to the external world is not a happenstance but a deeply rooted principle enshrined under the title of “academic freedom.” From unaccountability to irresponsibility can be a very short step. Other members of the intelligentsia, including both broadcast media and entertainment media, likewise have very wide latitude as far as checks on the validity of what they say is concerned. Their main constraint is whether they can draw an audience, whether with truth or falsehoods, and whether with constructive or destructive effects on the society at large.

However few are the constraints on what the intelligentsia choose to do in their work, the role that they aspire to play in society at large can be achieved by them only to the extent that the rest of society accepts what they say uncritically and fails to examine their track record. Despite formidable weapons wielded by the intelligentsia in their crusades for cultural, moral, and ideological hegemony, they are not always able to neutralize the countervailing force of facts, experience and common sense. That is especially so in the United States, where intellectuals have never gotten the kind of deference they have long received in Europe and in some other parts of the world. Yet, even among Americans, the steady encroachment of policies, practices, and laws based on the notions and ideologies prevalent among the intelligentsia has steadily narrowed the scope of the freedoms traditionally enjoyed by ordinary people to run their own lives, much less to shape the laws that govern them.

Sowell, Thomas (2012-03-06). Intellectuals and Society (Kindle Locations 9291-9319). Perseus Books Group. Kindle Edition.