

FOOD FOR THOUGHT
Number 10, Part 1
(NEW SERIES—2007)

**A LETTER OF LAMENTATION
TO
AMERICA:
THE UNITED STATES
IS NO LONGER
A SERIOUS PLACE**



What [was] really remarkable about [a *New York Times* article on George W. Bush published a week before the 2001 inauguration] [was] not Bush, but the *Times*. What [was] the *Times* trying to tell us? Once it was settled that W. was going to be president, the *Times* seemed very concerned with making it believable.

—David Cogswell, “Usurpation: The Coup of 2001 and the Inaugural Cry,” a Post-Script to <http://www.abebooks.com/servlet/BookDetailsPL?bi=869480730&searchurl=tn%3Dfortunate%2Bson%26sts%3Dt%26an%3Dhatfield%26y%3D13%26x%3D58> *Fortunate Son* (2001), by J. H. Hatfield (New York, Soft Skull Press)

[M]ost of Congress and the American public cannot imagine the degree of insanity that lies behind the Bush administration.

—Paul Craig Roberts,
<http://www.informationclearinghouse.info/article17863.htm>
“The Neoconservative Threat to American Freedom,” June 11, 2007

Schizoid anxiety separates the 64% who tell pollsters they don’t think [9/11] was an inside job <http://www.scrippsnews.com/911poll> from the 36% who know it was. Among the 64% who are in denial, internal

schizoid anxiety. . . throws up a mind-smothering smokescreen of fear and revulsion.

—Kevin Barratt, <http://www.mujca.com/nobaggage.htm> “No Baggage: A Report on My Trip to Morocco in Search of the Alleged Suicide Hijacker”
<http://www.mujca.com/waleedalshehri.htm> Waleed al Shehri”

[T]he Bush regime will do everything in their power to promote our denial, pretense, and silence. Our becoming silent is the very thing which allows them to literally get away with murder.

—Paul Levy,
<http://www.awakeninthedream.com/den51state.html> “Denial: the 51st State”

How did we get to the point where vast numbers of citizens turn a blind eye by choice?

—Carla Binion, *Online Journal*,
http://onlinejournal.com/artman/publish/article_2020.shtml
 “Knee-deep blood in the land of make-believe,” April 26, 2007

If a war crime was committed, it is elementary that those that aid and abet this crime are also war criminals. This includes the Congress. . . It also includes the soldiers. . . And, yes, to the extent that we don't publicly object to it, you and me.

—James Rothenberg and Otto Hinckelmann,
<http://informationclearinghouse.info/article17838.htm> “Why Being ‘Worst President Ever’ Is Not Enough,” June 6, 2007

Everyone around the world has both the right and the duty under international law to resist ongoing criminal activities perpetrated by the Bush Jr. administration and its foreign accomplices by all nonviolent means possible.

—Francis A. Boyle, http://www.amazon.com/Destroying-World-Order-Imperialism-September/dp/093286340X/ref=sr_1_7/104-4231058-3189532?ie=UTF8&s=books&qid=1182173768&sr=8-7
Destroying World Order, 2004



1

AMERICA INERT

I suppose that if a whole lot more change for the better than I can foresee right now were to take place, it *might* be possible—someday—for me to publish fiction again of the sort I’ve published before—in America, I mean. The odds of this happening? Right now I’d put the odds at something like ninety-eight *against* my own new fiction ever

seeing print to two in *favor*. On second thought, make that ninety-nine to one. After all, it's indisputable that our national population now consists of an overwhelming majority of made-in-America-morons. Few of such as these read at *all*, and, when they *do* pick something up, they're content only if what they read is TV-on-the-page. But, you may ask, what about the *intellectuals* of America? Well. There are exceptions, thank god, but by and large my response in regard to the nation's intellectuals, and *certainly* so for that huge part of them to be found in the humanities, is "ditto for them." *A Nation Gone Blind* talks about this matter centrally and at length, and I'm not going to duplicate the discussion here. But, as far as the educated classes in the U.S. go, the overwhelming majority of them, in keeping with the times and in parallel with their lesser-schooled countrymen, are in fact really just the slightly ritzier model—that is, made-in-America-moron-*intellectuals*.

In this awful sense, in the sense that most of the population has gone inert and moronic and unresponsive, it can hardly be escaped that http://www.amazon.com/Dark-Ages-America-Final-Empire/dp/0393329771/ref=pd_bbs_sr_1/104-4231058-3189532?ie=UTF8&s=books&qid=1182184426&sr=1-1 *Dark Ages America* has not just metaphorically but in actuality arrived, the evidence suggesting that it's likely to stay for a considerable time. Neither is this idea, any more than the idea that the educated classes have also grown moronic, a new one in my own writing. In *A Nation Gone Blind*, I called the process "simplification" and named our present age "The Age of Simplification." That age, as it turns out, has tremendous overlap with Morris Berman's http://www.amazon.com/Dark-Ages-America-Final-Empire/dp/0393329771/ref=pd_bbs_sr_1/104-4231058-3189532?ie=UTF8&s=books&qid=1182184426&sr=1-1 metaphor of the "Dark Ages" that have now overtaken America. The concept of "dark ages" is the very nearly the same as the concept of "simplification," even though the metaphors are different. And so in this essay I'm going to blend together "dark ages" America with "simplified" America, a metaphoric combining that allows me—no, makes it inevitable—for me to arrive at this resultant thesis: America, both *simplified* and overtaken by *darkness*, has become a nation that, whatever else it may be, *is no longer serious*.



Before going farther, I need to make a slight refinement and clarification of terms. Any historians who happen to be listening will quickly object that as an actual historical period, the European Dark Ages can hardly be said not to have been *serious*. And those historians would indeed be right. In the so-called Dark Ages, the extreme *severity* of focus on certain ideas, albeit extremely *narrow* ones, and the equally extreme severity in *denying* certain other ideas—well, these aren't traits that can honestly be characterized as not having been "serious." After all, these certain narrow ideas were taken seriously enough to die for, to assassinate and kill for, and to go to battle for.

But. The big qualification is that that particular seriousness, and the intensity of it, tended not to lead much of anywhere—except, that is, to more of itself, including the killing, the dying, and the going to battle that it seemed to call for and certainly resulted

in. At this point we come upon *one* of the reasons that the age came down to us carrying its epithet of “dark.” As if blind to ideas other than its own few very narrow and very serious ones, the period was predominately *inert*. And that inertness—in good part *because* of its own intrinsic inertness, you could say—lasted without change for a good long time. Charles Freeman, in <http://www.abebooks.com/servlet/SearchResults?tn=The+Closing+of+the+Western+Mind&sts=t&an=Freeman&y=15&x=40> *The Closing of the Western Mind: The Rise of Faith and the Fall of Reason*, provides an eminently readable history of the origins and development of the inertness—and laments the great length of time it remained more or less in place. Though clearly thinking more of empirical scientific development than of literary expression (after all, Dante Alighieri *died* in 1321, his life’s work completed, and Geoffrey Chaucer, ditto, in 1400), Freeman offers this remarkable passage about the long inertness:

However, Christian thought that emerged in the early centuries often gave irrationality the status of a universal “truth” to the exclusion of those truths to be found through reason. So the uneducated was preferred to the educated and the miracle to the operation of natural laws. After the defeat of Pelagius [c. 354-c. 418] the possibility that man was free to manage his own destiny was diminished. This reversal of traditional values became embedded in the Christian tradition and was, among other things, used to sustain the authority of the church. Intellectual self-confidence and curiosity, which lay at the heart of the Greek achievement, were recast as the dreaded sin of pride. Faith and obedience to the institutional authority of the church were more highly rated than the use of reasoned thought. The inevitable result was intellectual stagnation. It is hard to see how mathematics, science or associated disciplines that depended on empirical observation could have made any progress in this atmosphere. The last recorded astronomical observation in the ancient Greek world was one by the Athenian philosopher Proclus in A.D. 475, nearly 1,100 years after the prediction of an eclipse by Thales in 585 B.C., which traditionally marks the beginning of Greek science. It would be over 1,000 years—with the publication of Copernicus’ *De revolutionibus* in 1543—before these studies began to move forward again. [p. 322]

I can imagine a reader, at this point, feeling somewhat historically distant from the subject of the United States in 2007 and from the immeasurable peril it—and the world—faces under the “leadership” of the Bush administration. So let’s tie things together. At the start, I said it was unlikely I’d ever publish fiction in America again, in good part because “it’s indisputable that our national population now consists of an overwhelming majority of made-in-America-morons.” In an earlier draft of this piece, those words were followed by a string of others, declaring that “most of the population has gone inert and moronic and unresponsive.”

A Nation Gone Blind describes and analyzes some of the central causes for a thing so awful as this having happened to an entire “first world” population, and I see no point in repeating those descriptions and analyses here (it would be easier, anyway, for anybody who’s interested just to read the book).

Still, this awful thing *has happened* to Americans, and a simple re-arranging of words can help highlight the parallel between Americans *now*, in the early 21st Century, and Europeans *then*, in their long “dark ages.” What I said earlier was that “most of the

population has gone inert and moronic and unresponsive.” But let’s change it around now to read that “most of the population has gone moronic, unresponsive, and inert.”

And there it is: The *inertness* of Europe and Europeans in the dark ages has been reborn, re-established, and re-confirmed in the *inertness* of the United States and of the *population* of the United States now, today.

And, if the nation and its people are *inert*, neither of them, by definition, can possibly be intellectually, aesthetically, philosophically, or artistically *serious*.

2

AMERICA IN DENIAL

But before going on with the real subject, unseriousness, I’ve got to say more about inertness—specifically, about some of what *happens* as a result of it, or, to put it another and more important way, about what *doesn’t* happen.

I’ve written at length—again, in *A Nation Gone Blind*—about how Americans have changed in the way they *see*, mistaking for being empirically *real* what are actually only certain fake aspects and elements of life that have been pre-fabricated and habitualized for them by the mass media. People no longer see for themselves, but the media, first, see *for* them. And now we can see how truly hideous and truly pernicious the results of this form of blindness can be.

When people don’t or can’t see for themselves, *they’re going to miss a whole lot of what’s really there*. They aren’t going to “*see*” it. One powerful piece of evidence that people don’t or won’t or can’t see certain *empirically evident* manifestations and events in the actual world is that *they refuse to name them for what they are*. Torture, for example, is “harsh treatment.” The Bush administration did *not* gain office by a “coup,” either in 2000 or in 2004. The Bush administration is *not* a “junta.” The Bush administration is *not* a “regime.”

This sort of blindness, it must be obvious by now, causes people to live in what can only be called a permanent state of *euphemism*. Nothing is *seen* for what it really is, and therefore, as we’ve already seen, nothing can be *named* for what it really is. The horrible next step—which I’m sure you’ve seen coming—is that nothing will or can be acted *upon* or reacted *to* in ways that are *urgently, morally, and ethically called for by merit of what those things actually are*.

Take “invasion,” for example. People “*see*” it as something along the lines of “preemptive war,” which, hideous in itself, is *seen* euphemistically enough so as to be let go by. “Kidnapping” and the “disappearing” of people are “*seen*” as some vague thing known as “extreme rendition” and thus go by all but unnoticed—*certainly* not acted upon. And so on.

Now, all of this, people might say, is old, old stuff. And indeed it is. All you've got to do for some extended, clear, cogent descriptions and analyses of what I'm talking about here is, say, read *A Nation Gone Blind*. Or, for that matter, you could read *Babbitt* (1922), or *Main Street* (1920), or *Mrs. Bridge* (1959). All three will give you full and brilliant *fictional* manifestations of Americans living in worlds of euphemism and "niceness," of "not seeing," *their* worlds existing in, say, 1920, or 1922, or 1934 and yet in no way *wholly* unlike the world of not-seeing, *our* world, that we're talking about now.

Or just get hold of George Orwell's masterful essay, "Politics and the English Language" (1946) and read *it* on the subject of the uses of language as the supreme tool for lying.

There's also plain old denial. I say "plain old denial" because both the word (which, in our current sense, wasn't yet available to Connell, Lewis, or Orwell) *and* the idea behind it have become *so* commonplace as to be in the mouths of almost everyone—so that consequently, now, they lose more and more meaning with each utterance, since when words or metaphors come to be used *habitually* (remember <http://www.ericlarsen.net/foodforthought9.8.1.2007.html> Mrs. Ramsay), they come also to be used without thought, and *certainly* without *consciousness* of their meaning. (Poke around for the origins of "kick the bucket," for example, and see what you find.)¹

Whether "plain old" or not, the importance of "denial" as a vitally important part of this discussion is—well, undeniable—and here is as good a place as any to talk about it.

On the bus, or at coffee break, or at dinner, if you were to ask the person next to you—that is, if you were to ask *someone*—to define it, they probably wouldn't have a hard time. The same as you or me—don't you think?—they'd probably come up with something like this: Denial is a person's refusal to accept one fact or thing or event or another, usually because the fact or thing or event is in some way very, very threatening.

And *now* things get interesting. And they get interesting partly because this is the point where we get to ask this question: *Why* does such a person refuse to accept or acknowledge such a thing because it's threatening? Or, put a simpler way, *Why* does such a person refuse to accept or acknowledge a threatening thing?

Just as, in my "professorial" past, I really did hear choruses of disgusted students at points like these saying things like "*Duh*. Because it's *threatening*, stupid," I *now* imagine hearing choruses of disgusted *readers* saying something much the same. "Cripes. What a dumb question. It's *obvious*."

¹ Try Wentworth and Flexner, *Dictionary of American Slang* (1960). Even *they*, thorough as they are, miss being complete on "kick the bucket."

And so what is a person in my position to do? Give up? Acknowledge that the contumely being thrown at me is being *justly* thrown—since, after all, my question *was*—is—obvious, self-evident, and stupid?

No. That's not what I'm going to do at all. What I'm going to do is this: I'm either going to keep on asking the same question until I get a better answer—that is, a more interesting, more insightful, more interpretive answer; *or* I'm going to say, “Well, if *that* question is so obvious and simple and dumb, what's your answer to *this analogous* question?”

For purposes of dramatic effect—and because finding a more insightful answer is the *harder* of the two tasks—let's jump straight to the analogous question.

That question requires the brief setting of a scene. You've been playing softball with friends in Riverside Park, but the game is now over and you and your friends have climbed up out of the park and split off toward your various destinations—downtown, across town, uptown. You live farther uptown than any of the others, so you're walking alone—mitt in your left hand, bat in your right—as you climb the hill up the service road parallel to Riverside Drive. You turn right onto 99th Street, and, as you do so, you hear growling. On the window ledge of a first-floor apartment is a pit bull, fangs bared, ears flattened, angry eyes following you. As you take one more step uphill, the dog leaps from the sill and plummets at you, its open jaws aiming at your throat.

Now, before *asking* the analogous question, let's review what we've got so far as a working definition of “denial.” We've defined denial as “a person's refusal to accept one fact or thing or event or another, usually because the fact or thing or event is in some way very, very threatening.”

Okay, we've had the review. We can now ask our analogous question, and here it is—namely, what should this ball-player do? And, relying on our definition of denial, we can also *answer* the question: What the ball-player should do is go into denial, that is, refuse to accept the existence of the flying and open-jawed pit bull for the very good reason that it is indeed very, very threatening.

Imagine that you're me, back in my classroom days. For just how long do you think I'd be able to get away with *that* answer? Quite right you are, no time at all. They don't *measure* time in increments that small.

But keep on imagining that you were me, and that you were faced with a roomful of disgusted, laughing, in some cases even angry students. Those students would be saying things along the lines that the answer I'd come up with was nonsense, that it was stupid, dopey, idiotic, unworthy of a moron. They'd say—and *this* one is important—they'd say that it was *insane*.

And why is the last of the epithets—“*insane*”—so important? Well, here's why. It's so because what the softball player does in “denying” the existence of the pit bull

that's lunging at his or her throat *is identical to what Americans have been doing ever since January 2000 in regard to the Bush administration and its actions*. Now, in mid-2007, the Bush administration is even more of an exact parallel to the pit bull going straight for our throats than it was in 2000—and yet Americans, having over a period of several decades been transmogrified into made-in-America-morons, and having, as a *fundamental aspect* of this transmogrification, become “inert and moronic and unresponsive”—they, the American population, continue <http://www.informationclearinghouse.info/article17773.htm> even now, *this close to the endgame*, to do exactly what the ball player did, stand there in the face of disaster, but in the protection of denial.

The reality of what will happen, of course, is that the dog will continue to swoop, its fangs will crush the jugular, the victim will die.

Insane, indeed. *Especially* so when you remember that the victim was armed with a *softball bat*, and that just one well-aimed swing with some muscle behind it could have crushed the very skull of the attacking brute, rendering him harmless forever.

3

EMPTY AMERICA

All right, I know that there are flaws in the example—the ball-player wouldn't have had *time* to raise the bat and get in a good swing, there would have been a *window guard* to keep the dog from leaping out—and *no* one would *really* have sought protection from the dog by “denying” it.

But let's not sweat the small stuff, as an old high school friend of mine used to say. After all, what's the issue here? Well, it's huge. The made-in-America-moronic population of the United States, for what's now become *a period of six and a half years*, has behaved as if nothing *faked*, or *planned*, or *criminal*, or *treasonous* were going on as one after another of each of those very things has in fact taken place.

The Bush administration, as I write, is now a *twice-unelected junta* (no one seems to *see* that it's a junta, nor is anyone willing to use the *word* “junta”) that back on 9/11/01 cold-bloodedly murdered over three-thousand people in an elaborately staged “black flag op” that among many other things, by means of some <http://janedoe0911.tripod.com/StarWarsBeam1.html> yet-unknown but demonic weapon, caused World Trade Center towers One and Two (full of people, by the way, including cops and firemen, who *could have been warned to get out*) to <http://janedoe0911.tripod.com/StarWarsBeam3.html> *dissolve into dust* over a period of *only ten seconds each*, then did the same with WTC 7 later in the day, and, let's not forget, managed to sink a missile into the least-inhabited side of the Pentagon and the side the most difficult to hit, given the missile's direction of approach. Of great importance but given little notice was the behavior of the Secretary of Defense *after* that

Pentagon hole-punching. If you want to know what he did, http://onlinejournal.com/artman/publish/article_2026.shtml read this article by Matthew Everett. Suffice it to say *here* that what you'll find from reading Everett's piece is that the Secretary behaved in the most bizarre of ways, in ways that can conceivably make sense *only if the Secretary knew with absolute certainty that the Pentagon was in no further danger from any cause, source, or direction whatsoever.*

In other words, inside job.

We could continue with this kind of historical analysis of events before, during, and after 9/11, going year by year, even month by month, all the way up to, say, http://www.progressive.org/mag_wx051807 May 9, 2007, and the most ominous prospects that *that* date is now associated with. But, instead, we really need to move on with the subject of *this* essay, the one I'm writing now, the one called "A Letter to America: The United States Is No Longer a Serious Place." So here's an idea. If you'd like to look at a list of scholarly *books* showing that 9/11 was an inside job; *and* if you'd like to look at a couple of emails (or parts of emails) that suggest the extent to which the Bush administration has continued step by step, beginning with 9/11 itself, to dismantle, neutralize, tear down, re-arrange, and finally *destroy* the democratic republic of the United States—well, if you'd like to see such a list and read the two emails, I've arranged for you to do so, very simply, by clicking <http://www.ericlarsen.net/foodforthought10.1.2.2007.html> **HERE.**



But before we return to the clear and present danger to the republic—and the world—represented by the Cheney-Bush administration, we have some unfinished business to attend to. My imaginary roomful of students went nearly berserk with their sense of the absurd when I asked them *why* a person would go into "denial," with "denial" being defined as "a person's refusal to accept one fact or thing or event or another, usually because the fact or thing or event is in some way very, very threatening."

The students' answer, of course, was the obvious and perfectly circular one that "People go into denial *because* something is very, very threatening." And yet at the same time they rejected my lunging pit bull analogy, arguing that to go into denial in the pit bull case would be "insane" and furthermore implying, I believe, that *I* was insane for so much as coming up with the analogy.

But as we've ascertained already, I hope, and as it certainly seems to *me*, *that* kind of denial is *exactly* the kind that the entire population of made-in-America-morons has gone into starting with 9/11 and *continuing* in for the entire six and a half years since—a denial, I repeat, that has resulted in extraordinary and all but unspeakable dangers to us all.

But even so, no matter how unequivocally important those dangers are, before looking at them again we've *somehow* got to get my imaginary students to come up with

a better answer to the denial question than they did—which is to say, as said before, an answer that’s more interesting, more insightful, more penetrating, more useful, and more revelatory than the one they gave. An answer, that is, that’s *not just circular*.

Ideally, if this were a “real” world, class would come to an end at just this point, and everybody would have forty-eight hours, maybe even longer, to think about the problem, reason it through, and return to the next class period with some *better* answers, preferably answers already written down, the better for being read aloud and evaluated.

In fact, I think we should do exactly that. I’m going to propose ending right here for now, giving you the gift of time (I don’t know how *long* a time, I’m afraid) to think and ponder and reason about the question. You could *even write down* the results of your efforts, and, beyond that, you could, <mailto:ericlarsen@ericlarsen.net> email them to me if you chose, and, if they turn out to be good ones (as I’m sure they will), we could use some of them for starting off with next time.

Meanwhile, I’ll keep working on the next part of “A Letter to America: The United States Is No Longer a Serious Place” and will post it as soon as I can.

You’ve likely gathered by now, if you’re a follower of these pieces or if you’ve read *A Nation Gone Blind*, that I’m what’s generally called a “non-believer” in matters of the divine. At the same time, I’m still a believer in *prayer*, and, if that seems like a weird and unreasonable contradiction to you, I recommend that you read Thomas Hardy’s tiny but enormous 1916 poem, “The Oxen,” and also Philip Larkin’s wonderful non-religious and yet religious 1955 poem, “Church Going.”

Those might help you understand why I end—for now—with a prayer, and why the one I pray to is called what it is.

O, non-god, protect us all! O, non-god, protect us all!

—Eric Larsen

—June 26, 2007