

FOOD FOR THOUGHT  
Number 10, Part 5.5  
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**A LETTER OF LAMENTATION  
TO  
AMERICA:  
THE UNITED STATES  
IS NO LONGER  
A SERIOUS PLACE**

Part 5, Addendum 5



**Two Excerpts from *A Nation Gone Blind*, Chapter Three (“Consumerism, Victimology, and the Disappearance of the Meaningful Self”)**

1

Although there are exceptions, which I’ll get to in a minute, the observable pattern is simply this: Great numbers of people *will not talk* about great political matters that are unprecedented or of the most towering and important consequence. For example, they *won’t talk* about the possibility of interpreting the supreme court’s intervention in the 2000 election as the equivalent of a coup or the installation of a junta. And they *won’t talk* about the possibility that the Bush administration knew that 9/11 or something like it was coming but did nothing to prevent it since it would be useful to their own political interests. That is, people *will not even entertain the possibility* of such ideas.

But why on earth not? I’m not asking for agreement on any such questions, but I *am* asking—no, I’m imploring—that it be

permissible to *consider* them. To make it something *not* considerable seems to me the equivalent of willful blindness and very dangerous. I have an acquaintance who is an internationally recognized and highly honored senior professor at a major—no, an illustrious—university. Admittedly, he is conservative politically and considers himself so, but it seems to me that conservatism is one thing and denial another. In an exchange, I asked him whether or not law is built on precedent. Yes, he said, in extremely large part. I asked him if the court’s intervention in the 2000 election was a first-time thing and unique or whether it had a precedent. A first-time thing, he said. So I asked: Doesn’t the court’s action then stand as a precedent in this area of law, making it more rather than less likely that the court might again enter into a similar electoral matter and that a parallel or corollary finding might be handed down again? No, he said: It doesn’t and it won’t.

Even my acquaintance’s deep conservatism can’t explain this simple stubbornness: after all, he’s done something akin to saying “a dog is a cat,” or “a dog is not a dog.” He would never admit that he’d done so, but hasn’t he, in effect, said that “a precedent is not a precedent”?

On the face of it, an absurdity. But I think I understand it, at least to some extent, just as I think I understand the refusal of my colleagues, friends, and other acquaintances even to *entertain* the notion that the court’s action could conceivably be understandable as a coup. And the reason is that the very thought is unbearable. It is unspeakable. In a word, it’s *unreal*.

Indeed it is. And yet that’s the *very last* reason *not* to speak of it. (pp. 176-177)

## 2

A disconnect—this is the word that comes to mind, in its recently-acquired psychological sense. For the American mind does seem to have been *unplugged* in regard to certain things, unable to see them or, as I’ve said, even to *entertain the possibility* of them. The word “junta,” for example, *can’t* be used, *can’t* be taken as being even remotely or conceivably applicable to anything that is happening or has happened in the United States. It’s unreal. But what if we define “junta” as a power group that takes office by non-electoral, pseudo-electoral, or extra-electoral means and then passes laws depriving its citizens of liberties and freedoms that were previously guaranteed

and that, if such now-curtailed liberties and freedoms were in fact exercised, could be obstructive to the interests of that power group?

In other words, a definition of the Bush administration. If one uses the word “junta,” on the other hand, the idea immediately seems crazy and unbelievable, since the word brings with it powerful connotations and associations that have nothing to do with the condition, flavor, or atmosphere of daily life in modern America. “*Junta?*” a person on the street might respond. “No, of course it’s not a junta. If it were a junta, things would be weird, strange, extreme, crazy. But everything is normal. Everything is regular and familiar. Everything *looks* the same as always. So it can’t be a junta.”

And there, indeed, lies a very big problem. Insofar as things *appear* to be the same as always, they’re likely to be taken by people as *being* the same as always. This kind of assumption, up to a point, is a matter of perfectly natural common sense. If someone looks and sounds healthy, and claims to feel fine, we’re likely to assume that that person *is* healthy, even though there may be a disease within, asymptomatic and hidden. But we’ve got to look at the question of the determining power of the familiar, and at the question of judging things by their looks, much more deeply than just on the common sense level if we ever hope to understand what Americans see—and what they *don’t* see—and why. (pp. 179-180)