

# *The K.F. Stone Weekly*

(Formerly "Beating the Bushes")



## December 02, 2013

### **ANYTHING BUT ANODYNE**

For the past ten or so days I have been researching and writing the last of six lectures in a series entitled *How Many Trials of the Century Can One Century Have?* The first five lectures cover the trials of

- Harry K. Thaw (1907),
- Leo Frank (1915),
- Sacco and Vanzetti (1921)
- Leopold and Loeb (1924), and
- John Scopes (1925).

The sixth and final lecture, which has unquestionably been the most difficult to put together, is about the 1960 trial of Adolf Eichmann, the man responsible for organizing and then overseeing the Nazi extermination of 6 million Jews as well



as millions of gays, Poles, Czechs, Yugoslavs, and Gypsies. Putting together this 8,000+ word lecture (accompanied by a 95-photo Power Point presentation) has been far from easy; it has involved almost total re-immersion into the unspeakable horrors of the Holocaust through rereading histories, eye-witness accounts, government reports and transcripts from the trial. Time and again I've had to remind myself that it is the Eichmann *trial* -- and not the man's unspeakable, unfathomable crimes against humanity -- which is the central

focus of this lecture. Nonetheless, each day's research

and writing leaves me with a head that aches, a stomach tied in knots and a soul suffering the tortures of the damned. And, I am very, very, very angry . . .

Logging off the computer at the end of a long workday is easy; blocking out the history, the images and the rhetoric of obliteration is not. For diversion, I read a biography (currently David Thomson's *Showman: The Life of David O. Selznick*); I reread some Dickens (*The Old Curiosity Shop*); or I try to pay attention to what passes for news. The first two offer a dash of relief; the third -- the news -- is anything but [anodyne](#). What I see and hear is about as soothing as fingernails on a chalkboard.

For hardly an item is without buzzwords such as:

- "Nazi,"
- "Socialist,"
- "Bolshevik,"
- "Soviet-style,"
- "Appeasement,"
- "Chamberlain,"
- "Munich," and
- "1938."

And here I am *not* referring to the seriously deranged -- those folks who, unlike the rest of us sheep "know" that [FEMA has established](#) precisely 33 (or is it 17 . . . or perhaps 9?) concentration camps; or proclaim that they have [the "authority" to kill the President](#) or a thousand-and-one other idiotic notions. No, instead, I am referring to those whose underlying *modus operandi* runs something like this: "For anything and everything there are simple, shorthand responses -- responses that are intended to end debates in our favor. And the beauty of it is, once we come out with these responses, we don't have to get involved in any debate or discussion; we have rendered it unnecessary."

A couple of examples:

**Q:** "Can we bring health care security to millions of American families?"

**A:** "No . . . it's socialism plain and simple."

**Q:** "Can we have an intelligent conversation about income inequality and the concentration of wealth at the very top?"

**A:** "Hell No, because what you are talking about is nothing more than class warfare."

**Q:** "Can we reduce the nuclear threat – for us and the world – by engaging Iran in constructive diplomacy? What are its potential positives and negatives?"

**A:** "No, we cannot and will not discuss the issue; there are no potential positives; only negatives. It's Munich all over again. Obama is an appeaser just like Neville Chamberlain."

As MSNBC producer Steve Benen notes: *"These are knee-jerk responses intended to circumvent thought. But they've also become tired and predictable, so much so that when it comes to diplomacy and national security, conservatives keep reading from the same script, making up new Hitlers, new Chamberlains, and new Munichs. The only thing that stays the same is the role of Churchill – a role they hold for themselves."*

For me, the worst, most maddening and painful of all rejoinders are those which employ Nazi imagery such as referring to the president as "another Hitler," equating the Affordable Care Act with *Kristalnacht* or proclaiming that those seeking to limit the number of rounds in any single ammunition magazine are "just like the Nazis who first took away guns and then took away lives." It is insane; the relative handful of those who could truly be called Nazis -- or Neo-Nazis in America -- now refer to themselves as "American patriots," "sovereign citizens" and "survivalists." They're not the ones who bother me; goodness knows for every ten of these so-called "American patriots" there are probably a minimum of 7 FBI agents and people working for either the Southern Poverty Law Center's Hate Watch, or Anti-Defamation League keeping tabs on them.

The one's who truly cause me angst and pain are the supposedly sane, rational people who occupy high office, who have command of powerful microphones or are otherwise in positions from which to shape public opinion. The churlish use of Holocaust terminology and Nazi referents sounds the death knell for any further discussion; why, after all, would anyone want to engage in debate with one who has been labeled a "Nazi," or discuss a measure which has been connoted "another Holocaust." Not only does the blithe use of such referents place an insurmountable obstacle in the path of constructive dialogue; it turns history's single-greatest abomination into a meaningless rhetorical device. To my way of thinking anyone -- and I do mean *anyone* -- who gives voice to such terms proves him- or herself to be irrelevant; one who is vastly more interested in demonizing than dialoguing.

I strongly urge all those who are oh so quick to refer to others as "Nazis," "little-Hitlers," or "latter-day Stalins" to go back to class and learn -- perhaps for the first time -- the horrifying, all-encompassing evil that was the Holocaust. Your use of Holocaust terminology betrays a stunning, disheartening lack of knowledge,

sensitivity and basic tact. I also urge you to curb your tongues . . . the souls of millions of murdered innocents demand nothing less.

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December 08, 2013

## **WORSE THAN THE FIRST?**

This past Wednesday (Dec. 4), President Obama, speaking before a gathering at the [Center for American Progress](#) -- a liberal think tank -- called income inequality "the defining challenge of our time." It was precisely the kind of speech we've come to expect from the nation's 44th president: soaring oratory firmly grounded in the bedrock of statistical reality.

Using that admixture of rhetoric and reality, the president painted a picture of an America long in the throes of a second [Gilded Age](#), one in which just last year, the top ten percent of earners in the United States took home more than fifty percent of all income. And that, my friends is the highest amount ever recorded since data was first collected in 1917, according to [an updated report](#) from Berkeley economist Emmanuel Saez. The president noted that by comparison, in 1979 -- the year he graduated from high school, the top ten percent had a third of the nation's wealth in an economy where everyone's wages and income were increasing.

While President Obama certainly got his statistics right and gave articulate voice to a glaring, frightening reality -- the devolution of the American middle class -- one wonders whether he, or indeed anyone armed with good intentions and a bully pulpit, will be able to reverse the course. [Jared Bernstein](#), an economist at the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities and a former advisor to Vice President Joseph Biden noted about the president's speech, "*The diagnosis is very deep. Can he implement the prescription?*" Bernstein was quick to add: "*The answer is unlikely, but this is the debate we need to have, and it leads you to 2016.*"

While likening the capacious gap between today's "have-far-far-mores" and the "have-far-far-lesseres" to the reality of America's 19th century "Gilded Age" may be fascinating, it is also deeply frustrating. There isn't much that the comparison can teach; it is far more a description than a *prescription*.

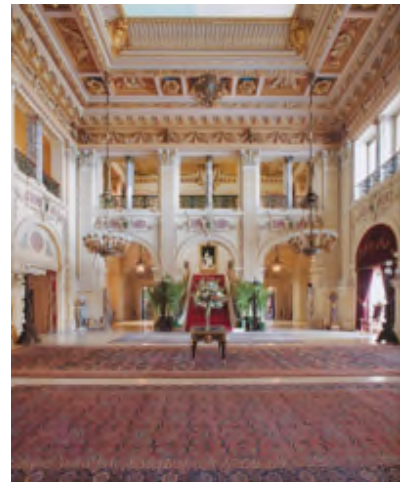
Mark Twain and the lesser-known [Charles Dudley Warner](#) were the first to call



the years after the Civil War the "Gilded Age." Struck by what they saw as the rampant greed and speculative frenzy of the marketplace, and the corruption pervading national politics, they satirized a society whose serious problems, they felt, had been veiled by a thin coating of gold. Ever quick with a sarcastic literary quip, Twain wrote at the time: "*What is the chief end of man?--to*

*get rich. In what way?--dishonestly if we can; honestly if we must.*" This "first" Gilded Age produced the fabulous "cottages" along Newport Rhode Island's Bellevue Ave - architectural behemoths like "The Breakers"

that were meant to be used for but a few weeks a year. It was a time when Mamie [Mrs. Stuyvesant] Fish threw a party for her dog, which arrived at the feast wearing a diamond-studded dog collar worth \$15,000.00 [That's \$389,637.70 in 2013 money]. Among those coming out to honor Mrs. Fish's pooch were John Jacob Astor IV's Airedale, Clarence McKay's Spaniel, the Elish Dyer's Terrier and Mrs. Harry Lehr's Pomeranian, "Mighty Atom." In all, 100 dogs attended the fête, chosen not for their own pedigrees,



Mrs. Astor's Ballroom

but rather for that of their owners. These folks would come to be known as "The Four Hundred," the people who regularly partied in the grand ballroom of Mrs. Astor's 30,000 square foot New York City mansion located at the corner of 5th Avenue and 65th Street. But that era of extravagant excess eventually came to an end. The Panic of 1893 was its *ave*; the rise of Progressive politicians like Teddy Roosevelt and Robert LaFollete and crusading writers like Upton Sinclair and [Ida M. Tarbell](#) was its *vale*. At the height of this first Gilded Age, it is estimated that 91% of the wage earning public made, on average, \$380.00 a year -- \$9,125.85 in current dollars. And yet, Mrs. Fish and her ilk could easily fritter away \$15,000 on diamond dog collars . . .

The more things change though, the more they remain the same.

On the same day President Obama gave his "income inequality -- the defining issue of our time" speech, the Ft. Lauderdale *Sun Sentinel* ran a page one story about the Oceana Cruise Line's new 180-day around-the-world voyage aboard the ultra-luxurious 640-passenger Insignia. Price? "Its all yours for \$45,000.00 -- and up!" the article proclaimed. In checking [Oceana's website](#), one discovers that the \$45,000.00 "and up" price doesn't begin to tell the story. Brochure fares range from a low of \$142,784.00 for an inside stateroom on decks 6 and 7, to \$316,984.00 for the owner's suite. Sound enticing? Sorry, the cruise sold out within 8 hours. Surprised? You shouldn't be. Consider that of late:

- The electric guitar Bob Dylan played at the 1965 Newport Folk Festival, when he shocked traditionalists by playing rock and roll, sold for a record \$965,000;
- Andy Warhol's grisly double-paneled 1963 painting "Silver Car Crash (Double Disaster)" fetched an amazing \$104.5 million;
- An anonymous buyer purchased a 1963 Ferrari 250 GTO racer for \$52 million;
- A 25,000 square foot mansion in Los Altos Hills, California, was sold for \$100 million to a buyer who likely will spend but a few days a year there, and
- A six-liter bottle of 1947 Cheval Blanc was purchased by an unnamed investor for \$304,000.00.

I daresay that few, if any of us, know people who can afford such indulgences. Don't get me wrong: I have nothing against hyper-wealthy people; may God bless them with good health and charitable hearts. However, what I see in all this is proof positive that we are living through a second Gilded Age -- one that is worse than the first.

How so?

Back in the days of the Astors, Vanderbilts and Whitneys the gap between the spectacularly rich and the rest of the country was both wide and broad. However, wages were on the rise as more and more workers began leaving family farms and moving into manufacturing jobs -- garments, machinery, shoes, steel and a thousand-and-one other tangible items. And although the wages were minimal and working conditions frequently life-threatening, hard work, coupled with education, a bit of unionization and a smattering of government regulation meant the possibility of entering the emerging middle class.

Compare this to our second Gilded Age. Where once economic growth was tied to an increase in the number of manufacturing jobs -- in industries that made things you could wear, drive, build with, sit on or eat at -- so many jobs today are in the so-called "service industry" -- positions that produce little that is tangible and much that is ephemeral. Shoes and shirts, tables and chairs, filaments and phones -- they're all manufactured in third-world countries. And where once people working at, say, Sears, Pennys or Woolworths could earn a livable wage, feed their family, put clothes on their back and look forward to better, more secure futures, today, those toiling for, say, Walmart, MacDonald's or 7-Eleven often need public assistance just to make ends meet. And, to add insult to injury, these workers are frequently accused by the haves of being "takers," "malingerers," and worse . . . "spongers."

President Obama is absolutely correct when he says that income inequality is *the* defining challenge of our time. But if anything is ever going to be done to ameliorate the level of inequality, it's going to take one hell of a lot more than oratory and rhetoric on one side of the aisle, or castigation and accusation on the other. I know I'm going to be pummeled for this essay and accused of being anti-Capitalist (which I am not) a Communist (give me a break!) or worse, utterly naive (not really, but I still hold on to a modicum of idealism). We need men and women who are unafraid to challenge the new Astors, Whitneys and van Rensselaers; people who are truly on the side of the working people of this nation and don't give a farthing for what names they are called.

Unless and until we really, truly figure out how to shrink the vast chasm between those who can drop \$300,000.00 for a bottle of wine and those who can't get by despite working 40+ hours a week, we stand a good chance of fossilizing; of becoming yet another one of history's mysteries.

Remember: all that glitters is not gilt. Sometimes it is iron pyrite, also known as "Fool's Gold."

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## December 23, 2013

### JUST DUCKY

We begin with a couple of disclaimers: first, I have never watched a single episode of "Duck Dynasty," and until a couple of days ago knew nothing about it other than the fact that it was some kind of A&E reality show featuring a bunch of Louisiana Bayou good-old-boys who looked like ZZ Top's poor relations. (Ironically, 12 hours after writing this introductory sentence, I learned that the show's theme song happens to be ZZ Top's "[Sharp Dressed Man](#).")



A second disclaimer: I am not now nor have I ever been a duck hunter, and really don't know much about the creatures, save *Cairina moschata* -- the Muscovy Duck -- a particularly ill-favored member of the *Anatidae* family which waddles around every inland waterway here in South Florida.

And third, I have never read any of the Duck Dynasty's best-sellers, which, I've learned, include *Happy, Happy Happy: My Life and Legacy as the Duck Commander*; *The Duck Commander Family: How Faith, Family, and Ducks Built a Dynasty*; *The Duck Commander Devotional* and the latest, *SI-COLOGY 101 Tales & Wisdom From Duck Dynasty's Favorite Uncle*.

What has led me to delve into and learn as much as I have about *Duck Dynasty*, the Robertsons and their Bayou worldview is, of course, the various comments "Duck Commander" Phil Robertson recently unburdened himself of to GQ writer Drew Margary for an article entitled [What is a Duck?](#) When asked "What, in

your mind is sinful?" Phil told writer Margary: *"Begin with homosexual behavior and then just morph out from there. Bestiality, sleeping around with this woman and that woman and those men."* Continuing this line of reasoning, Robertson added: *"It seems like, to me, a vagina - as a man - would be more desirable than a man's anus. That's just me. I'm just thinking: There's more there! She's got more to offer. I mean, come on, dudes . . . But hey, sin: It's not logical, my man. It's just not logical."*

Elsewhere in the interview, Phil Robertson said that growing up in pre-Civil Rights Louisiana he *"never . . . saw the mistreatment of any black person"* and that black people were happy (happier?) back then: *"Pre-entitlement, pre-welfare, you say: Were they happy? They were godly; they were happy; no one was singing the blues."*

As soon as news of the GQ article began making the rounds, it raised -- for better or for worse-- a firestorm of controversy. Within less than 24 hours, A&E suspended Phil Robertson indefinitely, despite the program's estimated 14 million weekly viewers. Such conservative political stalwarts as Texas Senator Ted Cruz, Louisiana Governor Bobby Jindal and Former Alaska Governor Sara Palin roundly condemned A&E's action, claiming it to be a clear and unwarranted violation of Phil Robertson's constitutionally guaranteed right to freedom of speech -- a violation they firmly believed was laced with the worst, most obvious strain of anti-Christian bias. Palin went so far as to post a photo of herself with the Robertsons and then tweet:

*"Free speech is endangered species; those 'intolerants' hatin' & taking on Duck Dynasty patriarch for voicing personal opinion take on us all."*

But Palin, the "Quitter from Wasilla," and the rest of her BBFs are firing blanks at targets well out of their range. A&E did *not* suspend the Duck Commander because they hate Christians or relish depriving him of his First Amendment rights. Rather, A&E -- a profit-making media company -- acted in the manner it did because Robertson's off-the-wall comments were about to imperil its relationship with advertisers.

And whether you agree or disagree with what A&E has done, it is nothing new.

Back in 1950, advertisers began blacklisting actors and actresses whose names were listed in *Red Channels*, the so-called "Bible of Madison Ave." Their fear was that employing thespians who had a reputation for being "left," or "pink" might hinder sales of their products. Actress Jean Muir was likely the first such sacrificial lamb. Muir (1911-1996) had been chosen to play a continuing role on *The Aldrich Family*, a popular television of the time. When NBC received a number of telephone calls -- "more than 20 but less than 30," according to a network executive -- objecting to Muir's employment, General Foods, the show's

sponsor pulled the plug. They simply didn't want to offend even as few as two dozen possible consumers. (It should be noted that Muir, who had been working steadily on both stage and in film since the early 1930s, was limited to but 3 minor roles between her blacklisting and her death 46 years later.) As reprehensible and cowardly as General Foods' decision may have been, it *was* their choice to make. As a result, there was a nation-wide consumer boycott of their products that lasted for many years . . . at least in my Southern California neighborhood where many, many blacklistees made their homes. One big difference between the Hollywood Blacklist and the situation with Phil Robertson is that in the former, people were condemned and made virtually unemployable not for what they (may) have said, but for the petitions they once signed and the groups they may or may not have belonged to in the past. In the latter, Phil Robertson is on what will likely be temporary hiatus because of his words -- words which many find boorish and objectionable, and others find both admirable and inspirational.

What Palin *et al* seem to have trouble grasping is that there *is* a difference between public censorship and private enterprise. With very few exceptions, there is no legal or constitutional right to free speech on private property. One can be fired for calling their boss a *schmuck*, just as one can be terminated -- or put on hiatus -- by a profit-making media company for endangering its bottom line. As folks who are hopelessly devoted to the rights, perquisites and profits of corporate America, one might think that Palin and her buddies would understand -- and support -- A&E's decision. For after all, A&E *is* a subsidiary of A&E Networks, which in turn is a joint venture between the Hearst Corporation and the Disney-ABC Television Group. If this isn't a prime example of corporate America, then I don't know what is. And, as both Mitt Romney and the United States Supreme Court have made abundantly clear, corporations are people and money is speech. Everything should be just ducky.

So why all the fuss?

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