

WHERE WISE MEN FEAR TO TREAD

The X Factor



Markand Thakar

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by

Markand Thakar

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Dedication

This book is dedicated to Dr. Betty Huber Thakar: my wife of fifty-plus, somewhat-hecktic years – and the mother of our three grown children.

My good fortune, as an autodidact, is that when Betty was going for her B.A., she selected English as her major. Betty didn't always agree with my contentions or how they were stated – but without her comments after proofreading: “Where Wise Men Fear to Tread,” and subsequent questioning comments, it's doubtful that my thoughts could have been intelligently presented.



Preamble

How on earth can anyone bent on discerning the truth about what's happening: locally, nationally or worldwide, go about attempting to do so?

Way back, during the centennial-anniversary years of America's fratricidal Civil War, the book, *Andersonville*, became a best seller. The book described the horrible deprivations endured by Northern prisoners of war when incarcerated in the South's most-despicable, infamous detention center. As the South's own food supply dwindled, so too did the meals allotted to their prisoners of war – this, until they were, in effect, being starved to death. Prisoners were reduced, like crows on horse droppings, to pick through the fecal matter of their fellow prisoners to garner the occasional undigested kernel of corn – in an attempt to stave off starvation.

It is much the same for the person seeking truth from amongst the mountain of verbiage spewed out by even America's most prestigious media outlets. It's necessary for the reader of newspapers and magazines to pick through piles of printed bullshit in order to discern a kernel of truth – and from TV and radio, it would be an equally difficult task.



The inputs of original concepts made by people living in the earliest of advanced civilizations are known to pre-date, by millennia, the historic evidence of the moral, spiritual, philosophical and mathematical contributions of the world's Judeo-Christian, Euro-Caucasian peoples. Despite this, there is currently a Euro-centric conceit being

circulated by folks who should surely know better, that credits the source of just about every cultural advance, in every conceivable field, to the sole doings of those peoples with mainly (questionable?) North-European origins. That this fallacious contention, which also has the mindless support of the followers of most of the West's ultra-orthodox and fundamentalist, my-God-is-the-only-god religions, is being used to rationalize the establishing of a *New World Order**, does cast doubt on the objectivity of their claims of cultural primacy by the West's supposedly-impartial, scholarly professionals.

*[*New World Order: the current euphemism being applied to an updated form of old-fashioned, predatory colonialism – which includes the renewal of a bemoaning by those championing it, of their obligation to take on the “white-man’s burden”. And this onerous burden is in the process of being shared by many of those former social outcasts who are so anxious to be accepted by the world’s — but primarily America’s — Anglo-Whitey.]*



Although death is but the second most significant occurrence for virtually all living things, quite naturally it occupies men's thoughts far more than the miracle of birth. Mankind's first inkling of the inescapable fact that he was destined to die was, perhaps, the catalyst that transformed his most recent, humanoid ancestor into a cognizant and truly-thinking organism – which, in turn, might very well have been the ingredient that gave Homo-sapiens the competitive advantage for survival over that of their Neanderthal fellow primates (though, it now appears that they too may have been aware, at least to some degree, of the inevitability of a death that can occur from so-called natural causes).

Death's impact on any individual's psyche varies in accordance with the to whom, why, when, where and how it occurs – and under what circumstances he or she is made aware of it. Most adult Americans living when Lincoln, FDR or Kennedy died might not have remembered the exact date it happened, but, in all probability they could have recollected how it happened and just what they were doing at the time. Each of those deaths had had a shock effect – it reminded people of just how transient life was, even for those men of renown who were destined to be counted amongst the immortals. No doubt, it's the inexorable aspect of our preordained impending doom that gives us such concern: confusing some and terrifying others.

It's this consternation, engendered in people the world over, by the unknown aspects of death, that has them filling the coffers of Christian churches, Hindu temples, Moslem mosques and all the other places of worship where the adherents of Animism, Buddhism, Jainism, Judaism, Parsiism, Polytheism, Shintoism, Sikhism and any of the other -isms conjured up, make their obeisance – as well as financial contributions (bribes?) meant to influence their God, Gods or God-like Unbound Spirits by way of His, Her, Its or Their otherwise-unemployable, paid, earthly representatives. All this, in order to ensure their (the adherents to one or the other ism) having a hereafter (preferably a pleasant one) — or, at the very least, affording them an endurable, if not prosperous, time on earth. Virtually all these Theistic worshippers were to delude themselves into believing that, if not their body, at least their personality (called their atman, soul, ghost, spirit or whatever) will have an infinite existence.

[It seems that the overwhelming majority of the followers of one or the other my-God-Is-the-only-god religions would prefer an afterlife, even if as soup in a box or in the depths

of Dante's Inferno, rather than an end in nothingness; one man's Nirvana, is another man's fate worse than an eternity in hell.]

*

In imitation of the Polytheistic Egyptian Pharaohs, the followers of the various my-God-is-the-only-god religions, those with origins in the Near East, placed a marker over the spot where they deep-sixed their ancestors. The purchase of mausoleums, headstones and self-glorifying monuments: intended to prolong the memories of the deceased, serve to allay the doubts that they and their heirs might have about the dangled promise of an eternal life, if not in body, then in soul – whether in heaven, hell, some otherworldly place or by residing here on earth in another animate or inanimate object — when not in a coffin. The aforementioned memorials are intended to commemorate, on into eternity, the claimed beneficence of the deceased when residing amongst their fellow mortals. And, unless the living-homeless decide to disinter the marked, indistinguishable remains of the long-dead, and return those vast areas of arable and livable acreage for human habitation, one would have to pity the poor pharaohs. They had built their humongous pyramids to preserve their mummified remains for their trip to eternal bliss – only to have their tombs violated.

[Although violations by grave-robbing fortune seekers and those foraging for easy-to-obtain building blocks were decried, later raiders of the Egyptian tombs were admired. These were the self-righteous folks out to gain their own immortality by having their names associated with their finds which could be displayed in world-famous museums. Of course, in all fairness, there probably were and are archaeologists who did and do their thing in search of knowledge, adventure or as a legitimate livelihood – much

as the oft-quoted Freud allowed that at times a cigar might just be a good smoke.]

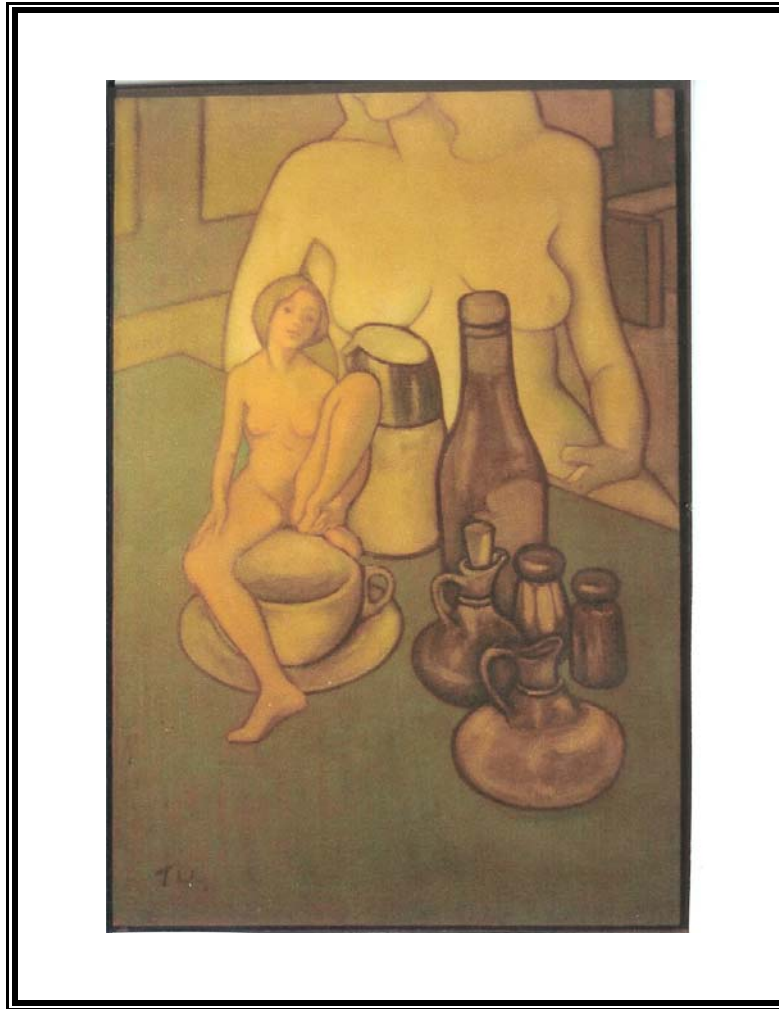
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The programmed-in-the-genes biological need for living matter, is to defy the finality of death. For virtually all animal life, the sexual transmission of their genes is their unwitting attempt to cheat death by propagating themselves as they engage in what must surely be meant to be a most enjoyable encounter – at the very least for one of the participants. Nevertheless, with the possible exception of a minute minority of Homo-sapiens, it's doubtful that any animals, while engaging in consensual sexual intercourse, give any consideration to the fact that they're passing on their genes to future generations – whether or not as a means of gaining immortality. No doubt, even the prim and proper Victorian lady, despite her supposed abhorrence of it, took pleasure in the act – and not merely because she was fulfilling the conjugal obligations inherent in her wedding vows – or because she was reluctantly satisfying the carnal needs of a loved one.

[It's been said, that one of the early Christian sects (confused by the conflict between the Bible-based concept of original sin and their obligation to go forth and multiply) claimed to only engage in sexual intercourse in order to procreate – while denying its pleasurable aspect. When fulfilling their obligation to multiply, women covered themselves completely with what looked like a sack for grain, but with a small opening to permit the begetting – which leads one to suspect that every time one of those Bible-thumping men passed a sack of wheat with a minor tear in it, his thoughts turned to those of lust – or procreation, if you will.]

Despite the attempts by Judeo-Christian elucidators of the words in their my-God-is-the-only-god Bible to turn recreational sex into a dirty word – many of those folks supposedly so influenced, have been quick to buy products thought to enhance that forbidden aspect of their coupling. It's this awareness that motivates the kind of sales-pitch created by the huckstering industry: an industry that exists because of its ability to sublimate just about every aspect of overt sexual desire – and those leering, you-know-what-I-mean attempts by an ex-senator and Republican presidential candidate to push the sale of that modern-day Spanish fly – are just the most obvious.

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West Village – 1970's (Oil)

I

The X Factor

[Some modern-day followers of the West's formal religions: those derived from a belief in a Monotheistic God Whose conceptual roots were derived from the ancient, Egypto-Sumerian, Greco-Semitic cultures, assert that it was due to the efforts of their professional clergymen that humankind was civilized. What rubbish. Devout followers of the Mahavera, Buddha and Confucius could certainly claim to have remained civilized as a result of the teachings of the devoted followers of the founders of their faiths. On the other hand, with notable exceptions, the orthodox and fundamentalist believers in the Bible-based teachings of those religions originating in the Near East (which includes just about every Christian, Jewish and Moslem sect, movement and offshoot) have routinely engaged in the same sort of heinous abominations engaged in by the other depraved peoples the world over. Nevertheless, the West's religious apologists continue to claim that when committing their acts of willful carnage, they were, and are, acting in accordance with the will of their particular version of the One-and-Only God – and that by doing so they were, and are involved in a civilizing effort. It's no wonder that so many thinking folks are non-believing Agnostics and Atheists.]



The Play

The action takes place shortly after the turn of the millennium, on a weekday evening in mid-August of 2002, at the Ukrania, a former ethnic restaurant, now much like any typical, contemporary, Greek-American greasy-spoon. It's located on a busy thoroughfare in Manhattan's East Village/Lower Eastside. The stage shows a cross-section of the front of the restaurant, with the entranceway and a small part of the street to the left. The main focus is on a group of tables that, as characters enter, will be pushed together to form one long table.

Act One – Scene One

It's ten o'clock in the evening when the first act opens. Dory, a lone elderly woman – a local, born-and-bred, Lower-Eastsider, a hard-of-hearing "Uke" in her mid-seventies: she's wearing clean, baggy, blue slacks; a heavy red sweater and a green knit hat – she has a shopping cart brimming with miscellaneous stuff by her side – which, when on the street, she uses somewhat as a walker. She's an unschooled artist, and having finished eating, she is seen continuously making crude, yet somewhat-appealing, naïve, garish drawings of ornately clothed female figures (often with geometric backgrounds) on pasteboard panels (up to about 2' x 1'), using large, colored-ink markers. They can be seen propped up on a table next to her (the manager allows her to sell them to his customers — which she does, at five to ten dollars each, depending on size).

Enter Ned: *He's a man in his late fifties. Despite his having a slightly-bloated face and prematurely-white hair, he has a boyish and somewhat handsome appearance. He's well spoken; a middle-class, non-practicing Irish-Catholic; New England-born; studied art in college; does some*

painting and now earns his living in one of the many art-service fields. He's dressed casually: slacks, open-collar shirt, sweater, dressy loafers, and is carrying the morning's newspaper under his arm. As he enters, Dory stops drawing and looks up, and breaks out in a welcoming smile. Obviously aware of her adoration, Ned, with an air of indulgent condescension addresses Dory.

Ned: “Hi, Dory, sell any paintings today?”

[Without waiting for an answer, Ned places his newspaper on a table and proceeds to drag it towards Dory's table.]

[Dory shakes her head, slightly abashed, she replies in her street-smart, gruff, non-ethnic, New York accent.]

Dory: “Not yet, but I've had three people look at them; and they promised to come back and buy some.

[Then, turning towards the rear and shouting —]

“I asked for a glass of ice-water and some napkins a half-hour ago!

[Turning back to Ned —]

“The service in this place is lousy — it's not like it used to be — I had to send my dinner back twice before they made it right.”

[She returns to her painting,]

[Ned mumbles unintelligibly and nods in agreement, as he sits and begins to browse through his newspaper.]

[The waitress saunters over. She's in her mid-twenties; the mini black skirt she's wearing exhibits a shapely but slightly plump figure. Then, speaking with a touch of a New York-Latino accent, kindly, but a little patronizingly —]

Waitress: “Be nice, Dory. What's wrong now?”

Dory: “I asked the busboy, an hour ago, to get me water and napkins.”

Waitress: “Okay, dear. I’ll get it for you in a moment.
[Then, turning to Ned, in a matter of fact, but polite voice:]
“Do you know what you want, or do you need a menu?”

[Barely looking up from his paper —]

Ned: “Let me have the broiled halibut, sweet potatoes and a green salad with blue-cheese dressing.”

[Ned returns to his paper, and appears almost oblivious of Dory’s adoring glances. Meanwhile, a young couple enter and sit in a nearby booth. He: a shaved head and dressed in black leather; she: green hair, wearing tight, low-cut, bun-hugging jeans and a belly-button-view blouse. Ned looks up as they enter and gives the girl a going over — lacking lust, yet with a thoughtful yearning.]

Enter Didi: *She has that kind of attractive look of a Parisian absinthe drinker in an impressionist painting. She’s thin, to the point of being scrawny; of average height, is flat chested, has bulging eyes, says she’s twenty four — which she might very-well be; and if true — her lifestyle would account for her appearing at least ten years older. She’s fairly intelligent, has a slight Southern accent, is White-trash with a touch of the tar-brush; is a hooker and a junky who is known to swipe the tips off tables as she leaves. She dresses streetwalker-conservative smart (no hot pants) and sleeps, free-of-direct-charge, with Ned — whenever she doesn’t have a place to crash (an overnight stay with a john or a near-bum lover). Meanwhile, Ned is in denial: as to her whoring and of his affection for her and his need of her — which may very-well be love. For Didi, Ned’s her connection with what she considers the respectable world — but she’s torn between the street people with whom she feels accepted — and that touch of respectability that Ned offers her.*

Didi’s self-concept is so low, that for her, it’s inconceivable

that Ned wants anything more from her than an overnight lay. In return, Ned, as a preferred john, compensates her for the trick by occasionally buying her a meal and giving her a place to crash. When at his studio-cum-office-cum-living space, she'd get up early, go through his pockets but never take more than twenty bucks or so (enough for a quick fix) before leaving for Tompkins Square Park.

Didi: “Hi, Ned.”

[Seeing him sitting alongside Dory, who gives her a contemptuous glance, Didi deliberately sits at the adjoining table, away from Dory (who continues painting) but next to Ned (who pretends to be reading his paper). Didi addresses Ned, as if in confidence, and out of hearing of Dory (who's selectively deaf).]

“I'm glad you called me. You didn't have to apologize. It's not the first time a man's hit me.”

[After a short pause, Didi bends closer to Ned, and in a stage whisper —]

“You know, Ned, I don't like to ask you for anything, but I didn't have the money to eat – can you buy me dinner?”

[He gives her an indulgent and tender look — combined with one of doubt.]

Ned: “What are you gong to have this time, champagne and filet mignon?”

Didi: “All I want is a salad.”

[After glancing over at Dory to see if she had overheard their conversation and convinced that she hadn't — with an amused and condescending air — while continuing to browse through his newspaper.]

Ned: “Yeah, sure, have whatever you want.”

[When the waitress returns with Ned's meal, Didi calls her over. The waitress looked over to Ned to make sure that

he'll be paying. Without a word passing, Ned nods his head, and Didi proceeds to order a lot more than merely a salad – the waitress smiles, looks over at Ned a little pityingly, and jots it all down.]

Enter Paul: *He's s slightly obese big-boned man, who, if he stood straight would be over six-feet tall. He's in his late sixties, is a glutton, says he's a retired university economics instructor, and dabbles in art. Artists, by their very nature, tend to be poor students, so his claims to having a Ph.D. and an IQ of 160, makes him highly respected amongst the group of middle-class, over-the-hill, wannabe artists who hang out at the restaurant. When young, he claims to have studied art, and he talks a good painting. His parents were socialists. He was brought up in a middle-class Forest Hills neighborhood, and still lives there. He has a tinge of an ethnic-Jewish, New York accent, overlaid with a professorial tone of superiority towards the lesser folks. Although all those claiming-to-be-artists, who congregate at the restaurant, know him to be a blowhard — they ignore it, at least in his presence. They're flattered that such a learned man deigns to spend time with them. And, they're loath to say anything to offend him. He suffers from the gout, and uses a cane, and at times, a crutch.*

[Paul sits across from Ned, deliberately, and snootily ignores the presence of both Dory and Didi — and addresses Ned —]

Paul: “I seem to be the first to have arrived. Usually there's a lineup of gray and white-haired men sitting at the table. *[hastily adding]* Of course, I also fit the category.”

[The waitress returns with a large Greek salad, a plate with pork chops and fries, bread and butter, and a vodka and cranberry juice. After setting it down in front of Didi, she turns to Paul, who manages to ignore her, while waving her away. The waitress shrugs her shoulders and walks away.]

Enter Tom: *He's a tall athletic, somewhat handsome, elderly man with a well-trimmed beard. He's been involved in painting (off and on) for most of his adult life, but worked in the printing plant of a now-defunct newspaper; and has recently retired. He has the nondescript, accent of a modestly-educated, real New Yorker, raised in Brooklyn, hung out in Manhattan and is now living in Queens – but is planning on selling his house and moving way out on the Island.*

[Tom, using eye contact and slight nods, acknowledges everyone present. Didi moves further away from Ned, making room for Tom.]

Tom: “I would have been here sooner, but it took me fifteen minutes to find a parking place.”

Ned: “You didn’t miss anything.”

Tom: “You’re right, there’s not that much that happens before midnight. And I stayed for the last pose at Evi’s place. They had a nice model who took real good poses – and I was pretty inspired.”

Ned: “Did you bring your sketch book? — if you did, I’d like to see how your work is coming along.”

[Reaching down, Tom opens his bag and withdraws a drawing pad.]

Tom: “Yeah, I wanted to get some feedback on my recent work — I think I’m making a breakthrough *[He continues*

talking as he passes the pad to Ned.] I've been trying to get more form into my work. But I want to try and keep it loose: something like Bonnard."

[Ned opens the pad, and gives each page a cursory glance.]

Ned: "This does have a little more form than your work used to have. But you've got a long way to go before you come close to Bonnard. After all, Bonnard was an accomplished draftsman who was playing with color — and its luminosity — as sunlight played on interiors — which he contrasted with that of the outdoors. I think it may be because you're moving into a kind of realism — from a background in abstraction — that your work still lacks an integrity. It's very free — and it's painterly — but it's missing substance. I just don't feel convinced. Maybe it's because it seems a little contrived to me. Getting back to Bonnard, I think his problem, if you can consider it one, was that he was too good a draftsman (which isn't your problem). Occasionally Bonnard couldn't keep from taking an academic approach when depicting certain objects. Of course, those few lapses didn't make him any less of a major artist."

Paul: *[Who's been listening attentively to Ned.]* "I can't agree with you. I think when an artist relies on his ability to draw, it prevents him from being creative. Artists such as Bonnard succeeded despite their reliance on craftsmanship — which causes them to lose their ability to be free and create an original vision."

Tom: "That's what I think. I'm not restricted by all that academic stuff. I'm free to experiment and discover all kinds of forms and color combinations."

Ned: "I think both of you may be rationalizing your

incompetence as draftsmen. The best either one of you are capable of doing is to lay in color on a canvas in a manner that gives the impression — that you know exactly what you’re doing. And, since both of you are doing fairly simple renderings of nebulous realities — your paintings have the effect of making a viewer feel that you’re competent and skillful painters. But, if you are, and if you’re being honest with yourselves, you’d have to admit that, as artists, you’re damned limited.”

Paul: “Of course we’re limited. I don’t consider myself to be an artist on a par with Bonnard — or Picasso.”

Tom: “Neither did I ever say that I was that great an artist.”

Ned: “How great an artist do either one of you claim to be?”

Tom: “I didn’t mean to claim that I’m a great artist. I think I’m a good artist — and that’s all I meant.”

Paul: “I don’t think that’s very fair of you, Ned. When we discuss our likes and dislikes of other artists, it doesn’t necessarily mean we’re comparing ourselves to them. After all, in the past we’ve discussed the Freud show at the Met — — and even though we too draw from the nude, we never compared ourselves to an artist of Lucien’s stature.”

Ned: “You know, if those big ugly paintings were done by anyone but a relation of Freud and a homosexual with Jewish ancestry, I don’t think anyone would have paid any attention to him — or his work. This may not have anything to do with either of your likes or dislikes of what Freud paints, but it sure as hell is the reason for his work being sold, and for its being shown at the Met. If anyone finds

fault with his work it's because he or she is sexually repressed, anti-Semitic or a gay-basher. And, of course, the opposite is true for galleries that sell his work and the individual collectors who buy it. In addition, it's a big plus for the directors and curators of those museums that exhibit it — especially in New York with its big gay, Jewish and shrink-going population.”

Paul: “I don't completely disagree with you, Ned.. Unless an artist has an international reputation, one that's been substantiated for more than a generation or so, buyers of art tend to collect the works of people they relate to. But that doesn't necessarily mean that the work they buy is second rate. Besides, much of it, despite its being bought for non-art reasons, has developed a wide-spread appeal. So, in America, the land of immigrants, those with English ancestry tend to buy the work of artists with names they relate to — and the same goes for those Americans who feel a kinship with artists they believe have Italian, Greek, German, Black-African, Spanish, Indian, Irish and Israeli links — or whatever ethnic, religious or sex group that they relate to. So if Jews, gays and neurotics want to buy Freud's work, it doesn't make them bad people. Moreover, since it's money that's always fueled the making of the greatest works of art – it's just possible that the exhibitors and sellers of Freud's art, are adding to the world's store of great art.”

Tom: “Yeah, and who's to say my work won't be considered great. I've seen a lot worse than mine in galleries — and even in the Modern.”

Paul: “Let's not get carried away, Tom. The chances that any of our work will be collected to any appreciable degree are quite small.”

Tom: “Maybe so, but I think what you’re saying explains why you put a price of sixty thousand dollars on the painting you have for sale on Gwen’s web site. You know you couldn’t get fifty bucks for it. So you might as well put a price on it so high, that you can claim that the reason it wasn’t bought was because your work is too expensive — and not the fact that nobody wanted to buy it — no matter how low the price.”

Paul: “I’m sorry. Tom. I didn’t mean to denigrate your work when I said that there’s little chance for our work to go over.”

Tom: “Well, maybe I won’t make it big. But I’m going to try and sell my work on the Internet. I’m opening my own web site. The way Gwen presents paintings can’t do justice to my work. And, ya know, I don’t care who buys them – or why they buy them — just as long as they get bought. Since I retired, I’ve been doing a lot of painting — and since I lost a lot on the market, I could use any extra money I can get from selling my work — no matter what the price.”

Ned: “That’s crazy. I lost a lot of money on the market also. But the chances of any of us making up for our losses by selling our work, are no better than if we bought lottery tickets.”

Tom: “Yeah – you can think it’s a crazy idea. When your father died your lawyer talked you into putting the money you got into stocks — and that was before the market took off — so, even though you say you lost over half of it since the market hit its peak, you haven’t really lost anything. But I put my money into stocks four years ago, when I retired. What I lost was real money — not paper loses against paper profits. So I gotta try and sell my paintings — and anything I get will help.”

Ned: “You know, Tom, you really shouldn’t play the pauper. Your union got you a good deal when you retired. And even if you bought stocks with the money you got, and even if you’ve lost a good part of it — between your social security, and the house you now own outright — you don’t have a worry in the world.”

Tom: “Okay, so maybe I’m not ready for the poor house.”

[In the background, as the men were discussing art and their investments, Didi, having eaten her salad, and while finishing her drink, had asked the waitress to take the rest of her meal and pack it up for takeout. No sooner did the waitress, after packing it to go, place the package in front of her, then Didi got up, grasped it, and began to walk out.]

[Ned calls out to her before she reaches the door:]

Ned: “Where are you going now?”

Didi: “Why should you care? You paid no attention to me the whole time I was sitting there.”

[Ned gets up, whispers to her (inaudibly), but in a consoling manner — and proceeds to walk out with her.]

[Conversation ceases, as all present turn to take it all in.]

[Dory turns away in disgust and addresses the others — in a loud and coarse voice.]

Dory: “**I don’t see what he sees in that whore.** He’s such a handsome man. He could get any woman — why should he be satisfied with a cheap slut like that?”

Enter Howy: *He’s a man closing in on sixty who still has a boyish quality. He’s a neurotic, has a discernible, ethnic*

New York Jewish accent, practices no religion, is fairly intelligent, says he's been in the service, owns an apartment in an East Village building that went co-op in 1970 — where, in lieu of a maintenance fee, he now works as the super. He's studied art, has a fair knowledge of art history and art's current trends, has modest skills as an artist, and periodically paints a tight still-life. He's been said to be as tight as bark on a tree, but it's his insecurity that makes him so frugal. He vacillates from being loud and confident — to being timid and thoughtful. He suffers from bouts of claustrophobia — can't take elevators or travel by subway. But, all in all, he's a very decent and sincere individual.

Howy: “I seem to have missed something. I saw Ned and Didi outside — at first I thought he just came out to smoke, but they're in deep conversation. And now I see all of you gawking out the window at them. What's it all about?”

Dory: “That whore came in here to bum a meal off Ned. She had the waitress pack most of it up and took it with her. I think she's bringing it out to the park — where she'll give it to her friends.— Probably because they get tired of eating the hand-out meals that the do-gooders give out free to the bums in the park.”

Tom: “I think it's more like a lovers' quarrel. You know — Ned has a thing for Didi. Yesterday he told us how he saw her talking on a phone — nearby on A. He said he followed her from a distance — as she walked to Fourth and B — where, she looked around before entering one of those not-yet-converted tenements. He said he waited across the street in a doorway — for half an hour — until he saw her come out with a man he thought he recognized from the park. She seemed to be having an argument with him, but after a few minutes the man pulled out his wallet and gave her a few

bills. The man then went back into the building, and Didi walked away. Ned says he followed her for a block or so before he confronted her. He said she told him the man was just an old friend — and that nothing had happened. He said he called her a liar, slapped her hard and walked home alone.”

[Dory continues painting all the while.]

Dory: “What did he expect, if he goes with a whore?”

Howy: “All I know, is that the other day I did a drawing of her — I used colored pencils — and it came out great. I let Ned take a Xerox of it — and he gave one to Didi. I don’t know if she liked it — but Ned said he really liked it a lot.”

Dory: “You made her look like a drug-taking hooker. That’s why Ned liked it, and she didn’t.”

[The conversation stops as Ned re-enters — he, a little embarrassed, and wanting to get everyone’s mind off his interlude with Didi, turns to Howy.]

Ned: “Hi, I didn’t see you come in. Before you came, we were talking about selling our work and having enough money for our retirement.”

Howy: “I don’t think I have to worry about it. I have a small pension, the house and the money my father left me — and, besides, I’m also doing the super’s job in my building — so I don’t even have to pay maintenance charges. So, as long I watch what I spend, I’ll probably be okay.”

Paul: “These days, only a fool couldn’t take care of himself when he gets old.”

Tom: “When I said I could use the money if I sold my

paintings — now that I’m retired, I wasn’t talking about old age. I don’t consider myself old. I’m still in my sixties — and I can still play handball — and beat men a lot younger.”

Ned: “Getting back to art — we’re scheduled to have a show at Lincoln Center. But it’s such a lousy space, I haven’t decided whether I should show in it. It’s a lot of trouble to sort out the few paintings I’d like to show, get them ready and deliver them. And, it’s not really a gallery — it’s just an entranceway from the garage, leading to the stairs that take you to the main lobby. The only people that bother to even look at the paintings are those who already know our work and the freeloaders who feel they have to look at them — so they can feel that they’ve earned their right to drink the cheap wine, cheese and crackers — that we all chip in for.”

Paul: “Maybe so. But, showing there looks good on a resume. Everyone knows that Lincoln Center is an important cultural institution. And, since so few people involved in art ever bother to come to the exhibits there, for all they know, when you tell them you’ve exhibited there, they figure it’s a plus. After all, for those who don’t know any better, anyone who shows at a prestigious place like that — in New York — must be a major artist. So, all I can say, Ned — is, since you’re still a young man — if you want to be considered an artist, as we say in academia, you must publish or perish.”

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Act One -- Scene Two

(Same Setting -- At Midnight)

The following have entered in the interim, and are seated around the table:

Maurice: *He's a handsome man in his mid-forties. He plays chess in the park — where he's a sure winner (but can't win any major tournament). He deliberately (he claims) loses to any of the boisterous black ex-convicts (they learned to play chess while serving time — and many play very well) who hang out at the Southeast corner of the park. He's the male equivalent of a J.A.P. (Jewish American Princess). He spends an hour a week with his shrink — which causes him to acknowledge his failings — but he still can't help bragging about his accomplishments (he tells of having minor roles in operas). He met Ned (who plays a fair game of chess) in the park. And, Ned invited him to join the art group at the Ukrania. The level of the accomplishments and intellect of the “artists” hanging out at the table is such that he feels secure.*

(Lynne (Jacqueline): *She's Long Island-born, a non-church-goer, appears of average intelligence, is often tight-lipped, about fifty – but looks twenty years younger (many women artists have been known to accomplish this). Everyday she's out painting street scenes — which may be part of why she's the most competent artist in the batch. That her work sells, albeit, at best in the very low hundreds, no doubt also accounts for their show of indifference towards her. Despite her being quite attractive, and her having been with a few of the less repugnant of the wannabes — she never got involved in a permanent arrangement. It may be because she won't kowtow to the egos of male artists — especially those whom she feels are*

inferior — or it may be that the run-of-the-mill, also-rans that she’s been bedding down with are merely laying her to assert their superiority — while for her it might very-well just be to satisfy her libidinous needs.

Gwen: *She’s a women in her late fifties, runs a web site for artists, has a pretty face — but is exceedingly fat. She was born in upstate New York, has no discernible accent — is a non-practicing Christian (she stresses it). She’s been taking art classes and hanging around artists for decades. Knows many insignificant artists, and but little about art. She runs a web site which is said to be quite professional in appearance — but little if any art is ever sold through it. Nevertheless, it allows her artist friends to claim they are actively showing their work, and that they have an agent.*

Sol: *He’s in his late seventies, a WWII veteran (was a prisoner of war in Germany), has an Al Smith accent — says he’s a non-practicing Unitarian, is quite intelligent, argumentative and verbally pugnacious — and is not involved in the arts. Sol is seen standing — while talking to those seated at the extended communal table. He’s in the middle of a monologue describing his time as a prisoner of war.*

Sol: “... moreover, the German army treated us well. And, when the Gestapo came around trying to find out which of us were Jews, they refused to give them any help. — I don’t know if you realize it — since few, or possibly none of you were ever in the service — but, after you were sworn in, your religion was noted on your dog tags. So, if you were a Jew (and during the war there were a lot of us in the service) there was a “J” stamped on your dog tags, along with your blood type, name and serial number. So, because of the German army’s resistance to the Gestapo, none of us, at least from our group, were ever bothered by the Nazis — and we were all treated the same.”

Tom: “It’s nice to know that they were good guys. But I have Jewish friends who’ve had their relations wiped out by the Nazis — and the only reason the Nazis could do it was because the German army, on orders from Hitler, captured the city where they lived — and the German army had to know what the Nazis were up to.”

Paul: “Tom, I know — because you were raised a Catholic, as was Hitler, you feel you have to be even rougher on the Germans than we are.”

Tom: “Yeah, and he was also a vegetarian — and I am too, is that also the reason why I have to be harder on him than you? You know Paul, I know you’re smart, and I respect you for your degrees — but sometimes I think you try to be too smart.”

Sol: “Wait a minute. I don’t need anyone to speak for me. I was a soldier — and all of us: Catholics, Protestants and Jews, who were captured at the Bulge, had surrendered as American soldiers — and no one, not our officers or any of the soldiers thought about the religion on our dog-tags — if anything we thought of ourselves as a kind of non-religious, non-denominational, Protestant American. And, all I wanted to stress, is that the German military, I didn’t say the Gestapo, only considered us as being prisoners of war. Maybe that’s some kind of warped sense of honor that they had — but that’s the way it was.”

Tom: “Maybe Paul’s right, maybe I feel guilty — sort of by association.”

Ned: “Look — all of us who were born Christians — feel some degree of guilt for what happened in Europe. I know when I was growing up in Connecticut we were torn

between believing that the Jews were lying about the Holocaust — or that they deserved it. So, if today, as fair minded and knowledgeable individuals we side, unthinkingly, with Jews — and demonize anyone who says or does anything that seems harmful for Jews, we tend to overreact in their defense.”

Tom: “Well, maybe so, but I have to admit, that there are times when I find some of my Jewish friends defending actions by the Israelis that makes me feel that the prejudice previously laid on Jews — has been redirected onto the Palestinians. And, when I tell them this, they end up calling me anti-Semitic. But, I think — and mind you, I have some Jewish ancestry — that’s bullshit. Because as long as Jews — and the overwhelming majority do — unquestioningly support — financially when not morally, every action taken by the Israelis as they go about economically, when not physically enslaving the Palestinians — while using the Holocaust as an excuse for what they’re doing — I think they’re hypocrites — and if that makes me anti-Semitic — so be it.”

[Pregnant pause, as all who’ve been listening seem taken aback by the mention of Israel — which has, ‘till now, been studiously avoided.]

[All while the conversation’s been going on, Dory is seen packing her paintings and equipment into her cart. She then rises with much effort, and turns expectantly to Ned.]

Dory: “It’s been a good night for me, I sold three paintings — but I’m getting tired. And with all this army talk — I feel you’re shutting me and the other ladies out. So, I might as well go home.”

[The neighborhood can get dangerous for anyone who looks particularly vulnerable: especially young women, old folks and drunks. The police, after midnight, clear out the

near-by park — and the displaced bums have been known to roam the streets: snatching a purse or rolling a drunk. Ned had been in the habit of walking her home (a half-block away). But often, especially after Didi's been around, apparently because he gets annoyed with Dory's hostile attitude towards her, he looks for one of the others to volunteer. As he sees Maurice begin to rise, he looks up to Dory —]

Ned: “Dory, I’m a little tired tonight — I think Maurice wants to see you home.”

Dory: [*cooly*] “Okay, but I hope you’re not sore at me for any reason.”

Ned: “No, of course not. I think Maurice wants the exercise.”

[Dory dodders around to Ned and Howy — giving each a big hug — waves to the rest, who barely acknowledge her leaving. Dory exits pushing her cart as she leans on it for support. Maurice, as he holds the door for her, nods to the others — and follows her out.]

[Lynne rises and addresses the others.]

Lynne: “I think Dory’s right. All this war talk is leaving us out. And, this guilt business does bother me — because I don’t think Americans should have any feeling of guilt for what the Nazis did. My father used to tell me about the war. He and his two brothers were in the service, and one of them died at Anzio, and the other was wounded and lost an eye in France on DDay. And, even though my father didn’t go overseas — he served four full years in the army air force. It’s not that the murdering of Jews by the Nazis wasn’t a horrible thing — it’s just that my family paid dearly for their serving during WWII. And, since about

sixteen million other Americans also served during that war, and my father told me that about a million of them were either killed or wounded during the war, I don't think Americans have to feel any guilt for what the Nazis did. And d'you know, my father used to tell his kids about the Russians — who were our allies. And, he didn't think that the Russians — who he said lost twenty million people fighting the Germans and their East-European allies — should feel any guilt. He said that if not for the Russians and Americans, all Europe would have been overrun and occupied by the Nazis. And then, he said, all of Europe's Jews would have been wiped out."

[With an apparent sign of relief, all eyes turn towards Maurice, as he returns.]

Maurice: "This is the fifth time I've walked her home, and she still hasn't invited me up to see her etchings."

[All smile -- with some laughing — happy to have the subject changed by the joke — albeit at Dory's expense: the preposterous thought that he, Maurice, could find her sexually attractive — an obvious attempt to impress the others with his manliness.]

Paul: "Lynne, getting back to your diatribe, what you're saying sounds just a trifle too anti-Semitic. I don't think you're fully aware that until the day America entered the war, you had the German-American Bund marching right here, in open support of Hitler — and that great American hero, Lindbergh, blatantly supported the Nazis. And, even while the war was going on, my father told me how Jews were restricted from going to certain hotels or from living in many parts of American cities."

Tom: "Ya know Paul, I have to admit that I pretty much agree with you, at least to some degree, that anti-Semitism

was around and still is, and I do think that it's vicious — and totally uncalled for. But, how the hell can they, despite the deaths of those millions of Jews — all while their God stood by and did nothing, still strut around with their beanies on, as if they're His chosen people. I'm sorry, but I think that anyone who claims to be one of the chosen is talking nonsense. And, because I say it, Jews, who've known me for years, still tell me that I'm being anti-Semitic — or because my mother was born a Jew, a self-hater."

[Tom pauses, and everyone, being a little embarrassed, pretends to be otherwise absorbed.]

Tom: "Ya know, there was a time when I was beginning to think of myself as an Agnostic — but, in more recent times, I've found myself drifting back to Catholicism. And today, I have no doubts about it. My father, as a Roman Catholic growing up in Russia, was aware that neither his folks, those who were Orthodox Russian Christians or Russian Jews looked any different from one another. And, since all of us, Jews, Christians and Moslems take our in-the-beginnings ancestry from the Bible, that most Jews seem to consider themselves the sole descendants of those folks — makes it pretty insulting to non-Jews. And I'm pretty sure that includes Moslems, who also take their in-the-beginnings from the same Book. All of us claim we descended from Adam and Eve — and consider Abraham as one of our own. So where the hell do so many Jews get off acting so damn superior — even claiming a racial superiority — when genetically, they're no different than most Central European Christians and Moslems?"

Paul: "I hope you're not rationalizing the cruelty imposed on Jews because of their religious beliefs. Forgetting all about the Holocaust, I don't think that you're fully aware of the constant little, and not so little insults that Jews are subjected to by Christians — at every level: socially as well

as economically. Of course, I must admit, that since I was brought up in a Jewish household, although with parents who claimed to be Atheists, and I was brought up as one, I was instilled, not as a Jew, but as an individual, of the need to excel in school. And, I remember that I was given a book that prepared me for an IQ test that was being given in high school. I was also taught the value of money. But, since I was intelligent enough to get an advanced degree and earn a decent living as a college instructor — I didn't have to compete on a day-to-day basis with others, whether Christians or Jews, to make myself economically secure. — But, to be honest, I think, if I had to, I could have become as competitive — as the most aggressive folks of any religion.”

Gwen: “All this soul searching has nothing to do with art. It's because everyone here is supposed to be an artist that I come by so often. And, if it's not your stocks, then you're talking about religion. I wish you'd all just send in your payment for your listings on my web site. All you artists want to have your work on view, but few of you want to pay for it. I've been signing-up some art instructors from around the city — and they've given me slides of their work — but even they, despite their having a steady income, are slow to pay my fee. Some of them complain, because I take a percentage of the sales price, in addition to their having to pay a yearly fee. But if I didn't charge a fee, I wouldn't be able to pay for anything. Because all of you put such unrealistic prices on your work, none of it is selling — and I doubt if it's because of either the web site or the recession — the percentage of nothing that I get — is nothing. So I don't know why any artists should complain about my fee.”

Lynne: “Well, I don't mind talking about the war. But, as far as your web site goes, I don't really need it — I can sell my paintings on my own — at my price, and even though I paid your fee, you haven't sold even one. So, as far as your

fee for putting artwork on your web-site, I don't think it's worth it. Almost nothing sells, and even if someone buys a painting because of the way it looks on their computer screen — since they all use a credit card when paying — when it's delivered, and the buyer sees the way it actually looks, he or she cancels payment and ships the painting back to you — collect. And then I have to pay to get it back from you.”

Gwen: “I'm sorry you feel that way. But I have more artists who want to show on my web site than I can handle — — and anytime you want to have your work withdrawn — just let me know.”

Ned: “Look, if you people want to fight, go somewhere else. I come here to eat my dinner — in peace. And, if we're going to talk about art, let's talk about it, instead of about selling it.”

Gwen: “That's fine for you to say. You manage to live well without ever selling a painting — but if others didn't sell their paintings you couldn't make a living.”

Lynne: “Yeah. I do my own framing. So, I don't need you. I also sell direct to art-buyers, so I don't need an agent or gallery. But I still have to hunt for the best deals for art supplies — because if I didn't, I couldn't live off my art.”

Ned: “You're right, Lynne. And that's why I do framing to earn my living. We all know that only a few superstars and a handful of academic hacks manage to live well off their art. But art schools and their teachers; art magazines, newspapers and their critics; art galleries and dealers; artist's agents; art museums and their employees; art handlers and truckers; manufacturers and sellers of art supplies — all make the really big bucks due to the making

of art. Framers also make a good buck from art, but artists like yourself, and there are a lot of you, either sell their work unframed or do their own framing. Besides I'm an artist too, and by not having to earn my living from the sale of my work, I can paint what I want."

Lynne: "I'm sorry, Ned. But, sometimes I get so pissed by buyers who say they like your work and then try to buy it at a price that barely covers my costs, that I get mad at everyone who makes a living off what artists do."

Ned: "Forget it. I know how you feel I'm a better artist than a framer, but I can't live off the sale of my art."

Tom: "The government should support the artists. That's what FDR did during the depression."

Paul: "Maybe so. But those artists were hired by the government to give a sop to the more liberal elements of America's working class. My father was a WPA artist, and he told me how so many of those artists were on the verge of joining the Communist party. And many would have, if not for the money they received because of Roosevelt's social programs. My father told me, that he would have joined the Lincoln Brigade and fought against Franco in Spain — if not for the money he got because of the New Deal."

Tom: "Well I lost a lot on the market, and I can use the government's help so I can continue to paint."

Ned: "Tom, you'd paint whether or not you got money from the government. Many of the artists who benefited from Roosevelt's handouts were already established — they had been selling before the depression. And, since nobody was buying art during the depression, there was a bona fide

reason for supporting them. But you don't sell now — and you'll continue to paint — because you really don't need government welfare. And, you know what, I don't think widespread benefits to everyone claiming to be an artist helps serious artists or the state of art. There are no rules to art nowadays — so the dole would be strictly a political thing. So, who needs it?"

Tom: "Sometimes I think your New England upbringing, with its puritan work ethic gets the better of you. I can use all the financial help I can get — and I don't care who else gets it."

Ned: "Well, I was talking about the big picture. And that's whether or not art, itself, and not individual artists benefit. In Holland, after the war, each year the government bought a couple paintings from any Dutchman claiming to be an artist. They were paid enough to live on. But, in time they had so many paintings that they no longer had space to store them — so they stopped doing it. And, do you know what, I can't think of one Dutch artist who benefited from it."

Paul: "Perhaps it's the effect of my father's having been a socialist, but I agree with Tom. At least when he says that the government should support the arts. And, maybe even if the money is wasted — it wouldn't bother me. Because, I believe that any money spent on the arts is good — wasted or not."

Ned: "I can see what you're driving at. Whether it's wasted or not, just the fact that society cares enough about art to support it, is a positive thing, in general, for the arts."

Paul: "Yes, it's a little like money that goes to folks on welfare — it really doesn't matter whether it's wasted or

not. For the nation, as a whole, it makes everyone of its citizens a better person — not because it does or doesn't help the poor, but just by giving, it shows that the nation cares about their plight; and that makes everyone into a better person.”

Ned: “I never thought of it like that, maybe Tom’s right — and my New England upbringing, with its stress on the work ethic, prevents me from seeing the uplifting aspects of a handout — whether it’s to the poor, or to artists. But, you know what, no matter how you rationalize it, I still think it’s wrong.”

Paul: “Well Ned, although I have no particular love for Islam, its followers give to the poor — not to benefit them so much, but because that’s one of the few requirements entailed in being a good Moslem.”

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The X Factor

Act Two -- Scene One

Same Setting -- Ten Months Later -- At Midnight

Seated around the tables are Ned, Tom, Paul, Howy, Maurice, Lynne, Gwen and Sol.

Ned: “I guess we should be happy as all hell that the assault on Iraq is over — and that, at least militarily, it appears to have been a success. But, now, since Bush has publicly stated that he’s running for president in 2004 — no doubt, so he can use his office to extract big bucks for his run for reelection, I no longer feel the restraints of enforced, feigned patriotism. I now feel free to say exactly how I feel about Bush and his unwarranted attack on Iraq — which had absolutely nothing to do with 9/11. Aside from his accomplishing any personal ends: those of a dubious nature, all he’s managed to do was alienate the rest of the non-Judeo-Christian and non-Anglo-American world — and not only Moslems — which would be bad enough.”

Tom: “I know you weren’t for our going to war with Iraq, but after all, we did get rid of the murdering bastard. And, we’re now in the process of bringing democracy to the Iraqi people.”

Ned: “Oh, for Christ’s sake, do you really believe that that was the reason for the attack? Are you saying that this president, when as Commander-in-Chief of the mightiest armed force that the world has ever known, ordered the attack on Iraq — a nation with but a third-rate military — was concerned with bringing a true democracy to the people of that oil-rich nation? I should think that a true

democracy would be the last thing that Bush would tout. After all, his brother fixed the election for him in Florida — and it was then validated by a Supreme Court controlled by a majority with Neanderthal mentalities. His election was hardly the result of a true democracy in action.”

Tom: “Look, I’m not going to defend him, I don’t like him either. He’s a man with limited intelligence and limitless power. And, with his total lack of empathy for the less-than wealthy, he has all the makings of a tyrant. And I can’t help feeling that, despite those three C’s: Condoleezza, Clarence and the good-cop Colin, all in goose-step with him — that at heart he’s a racist. But, even though I think his invasion of Iraq was due to his greed and religion-based, racist mentality, I still think it was a good thing that we got rid of Saddam. And, it was done with little loss of American life.”

Ned: “I should hope so. After all, this president who sent our soldiers to Iraq, had in the past asked his papa to help him join what used to be known as the Home Guard — all to keep him out of harm’s way — in Vietnam. Moreover, there are many who feel that his attack on Iraq was really motivated by his need to establish a macho cover-up for his staying away, wimp-like, from Washington on 9/11. And remember, even if American casualties were relatively low, hundreds if not thousands of our troops were and still are in the process of being killed and wounded as we go about killing-off those thousands of poor Arab bastards who were and still are making a feeble attempt to maintain the arrogant, yet hapless regime of Saddam Hussein. Let’s not forget, that by the time Bush, Texas-posse-like, sent American troops, along with the tag-along Brits (all armed with the world’s most advanced weaponry) into Iraq, that oil-rich nation had already been reduced militarily to the point where its army was no more of a threat than Argentina’s army was in the Falklands for the Brits under

Thatcher — or for the American troops sent into Granada by Reagan. For whatever my feelings are about papa Bush, at least he was involved in a real war. In just one battle, like Iwo Jima or Guadalcanal during WWII — American troops faced a truly formidable foe — not the poorly-armed, ragtag hangers-on of an un-defendable Iraq.”

Paul: “I don’t wish to make light of what you’re saying, but I think you’re comparing apples and oranges. There’s no question that this was no WWII. By your comparing WWII to the Iraqi action — it’s like comparing the works of artists of a bygone era — with the artwork of contemporary artists. And, realistically, since there are so many variables to consider, it’s not really possible to compare them.”

Lynne: *(Taking advantage of a short pause, Lynne stands up and confronts the men.)*

“I don’t see the connection between art and the invasion of Iraq, but I’m glad you brought the conversation back to art. Since woman play such a minor role in warfare (although we produce its cannon fodder), I don’t feel right in voicing my opinion when the moralized killing in wartime is being discussed — especially since I have no children to send off to war. And, besides, even today — it’s almost always men who lose their lives in battle.”

Ned: “I tell you why Paul’s right, when he makes the connection between art and war. After all the bullshit is shoveled away, art, just like the Iraqi thing, is just about money and politics. There’s no more of a moral principle involved in the takeover of Iraq, than there is in the making of today’s art. When you remove the hype, whether it refers to the making of war or art, it’s all about money and politics — just money and politics, baby.”

Lynne: “Hey, look. Just because I said women tend to play

a minor role when wartime killings take place, doesn't mean I want you to give me any of this condescending "baby" crap."

Paul: (*Addressing Lynne*): "I'm sure that Ned had no intention to insult women — he's surely not a sexist. I believe he merely wanted to stress his contempt for the politics and greed that permeates the activities of the art market, which he perceives, parallels the doings of the Bush administration. (*Then, turning to Ned*): Getting back to the equating of any aspect of art to the Iraqi war — I must admit that it tends to confuse the issues. As an artist, I feel that the making of art is a manifestation of mankind's greatest achievements: ones that transcend the mundane aspects of life — and of course, is therefore a laudatory endeavor. Whereas, the making of war, unless in defense of one's freedom and loved ones, is the very negation of our civility — and hardly worthy of praise."

Lynne: "Paul, don't turn away from me as if I'm too dumb to understand the more highfalutin stuff you're spouting. It's obvious that I'm not involved in all this macho stuff that men are. But killing is killing, and it's wrong — especially in a war of aggression. As an act of self-defense, may be the only reason that can justify it — and even then, deadly force should be used only if absolutely necessary."

Gwen: "You artists really annoy me. All you ever talk to me about — is how much money you can get for your paintings. But now you make out that greed is a sinful act. Idealism is what you pretend to be motivated by: always claiming that the making of art is your gift to society. What hypocrisy! Come off it! You people are as money-hungry as the Bush people who fostered the attack on Iraq — at least they don't make any bones about it."

Paul: “I can understand your displeasure, Gwen. But, first I’d like to correct you on the question of our being told the truth about the Iraq business. We were never told the real reasons for our invasion of that country. As to our involvement, as artists, with money matters, it’s because the value of those high-tech stocks listed on NASDAQ fell so precipitously. And, this does make the prices we expected to receive for our work seem totally unrealistic. But, since so many of us have lost considerably on the stock market, you must understand that our need to sell is not due to avarice, but due to an attempt to maintain our income level. Moreover, hypocrisy and greed are hardly sins engaged in only by artists and the Bush people.”

Gwen: “Paul, sometimes I have great difficulty understanding you. I guess what you’re saying is that greed and hypocrisy are so universally practiced that it makes a hypocrite a moral person. And, if that’s so, I can’t see how any of you can find fault with America’s conquest of Iraq. After all, evidence of our hypocrisy and greed, as we go about divvying up Iraq’s oil wealth, is only too evident. Everybody’s a sleaze — so, why not us? If everyone’s a sleaze then being a murdering sleaze is hardly an overly-immoral pastime.”

Lynne: “Here I’m blaming the men for talking about war, because it leaves us out, and now you’re doing the same damn thing.”

Gwen: “I am concerned about the war. I may be a woman, but I’m also involved in the business of trying to sell the work of you artists. And, in case you don’t realize it, selling art these days is not easy. And the war, the economy, and the anti-art mentality of the Bush people doesn’t make it any easier. These days, people don’t buy art because they like it. They don’t even buy it because the colors in it match

those of their drapes. They buy it like a lottery ticket, in the hope that it'll make them rich. And so, when we go about trying to sell your stuff, we don't talk about the quality of your work — anyhow, these days there's no criteria to judge it by — instead, we have to sell your work by building up your persona — so that it's interesting enough to make the buying of your artwork a good investment. And, ya know what, there's not one of you who have a persona I can sell. So if you want me to be able to get a good price for your work, you'll have to become famous, or even infamous — but do something besides paint; show in restaurants and third rate galleries and hangout in a greasy-spoon. And even if you get a name for yourself, unless you're damn lucky, or have the right connections, it won't be until long after you're dead and buried, that the art-things of your making — ones that I've been able to sell for even a few hundred dollars, at most — could possibly be worth anything at all — let alone the millions that could make the buyers rich. So, all of you had better forget about your work hanging in museums or your heirs becoming millionaires. Either get off your cans and do something, or else, just relax and take pleasure in what you're doing now.”

Lynne: “I work hard. I go out painting every day. I lug my fully-loaded French easel and a couple canvases an average of half-a-mile to find a scene I want to paint. Then, when I'm hungry, or nature calls, I have to pack everything up and drag it to a pizza parlor or falafel joint with a john — and then, after eating and whatever, go back and set up all over again. I do this because I like what I'm doing. I also expect to earn my living as an artist. And if I make a few hundred dollars from a painting — I'm happy. But even when asking only a few hundred dollars for a painting, and even when a prospective buyer likes it, they try to Jew me down.”

Paul: “I wish you wouldn’t use that term. It’s a stereotypical caricature of Jews as chiselers that’s been fostered by bigots. I’ve noticed that when Christian friends of mine dicker with a vender, and get a better price, they consider themselves resourceful. If I do it I’m considered a chiseler – and probably a cheap Jew.”

Lynne: “I’m sorry Paul, I really didn’t mean to offend. It’s just a term that was used by everyone, when I was growing up on the Island.. We used so many terms like that, without realizing what they really meant.”

Tom: “Ya know Lynne, I grew up in Brooklyn, and I know just what you mean. We drank Dago-red; ate at the Chinks had friends who were shanty-Irish, Greasers and dumb-Polacks; Jungle Bunnies lived in Harlem; if you asked for the return of a loan you were an Injun-giver; when we played Chinese handball, we called a ball that popped up from the corner a Hindu, Redheads were supposed to be hot; we referred to Rebs; White Trash; Hillbillies, frogs and Krauts — as well as Jewing-down the price. And, we didn’t think we were being bigoted — and ya know what? we weren’t — at least we weren’t conscious that we were. But, once people became aware of what happened to the Jews in Europe, decent people stopped using any derogatory references to Jews. So I think we should all make a conscious effort to exclude Jewing-down from our vocabularies. These days, it’s really the kind of stuff that we only hear from Moslems and neo-Nazis.”

Lynne: “Jesus! What the hell are you doing? Are you calling me a bigot. I didn’t mean anything by it. Let’s forget it. I hate haggling over the price of my paintings. I price them very reasonably — yet everyone, and I’m not talking about Jews, although I can’t exclude them, always try and get it for less.”

Ned: “Tom, I think you’re too influenced by your mother. When she married your father, she may have agreed to have her children baptized as Catholics, but every time you visit her family you get so bombarded with pro-Israel propaganda, that you lump up anyone who finds fault with anything that Jews or Israelis do as a sign of anti-Semitism — and then liken them to Moslems and Neo-Nazis. Although there’s no question that anti-Semitism exists, let’s not forget that the percentage of American Jews who are far more outspoken in their race-based negative attitude towards Moslems is far greater than that of Christians towards Jews. I’ve never heard you say one good thing about a Moslem or an Arab, for that matter.”

Paul: “Anti-Semitism has not been eradicated. Disparaging remarks about Jews, even today, aren’t limited to Neo-Nazis and Moslems. Part of the reason for its being perpetuated has to do with the way Jews are presented in some of the greatest works of Western literature. At best they were presented as forlorn outsiders — at worst sleazy money grubbers. However, I must admit, that, from what I see, many Jews seem to prefer to be mentioned disparagingly, than be ignored. And, although no morally upright person could be expected to ignore the Holocaust, when Jews use it as an excuse for an action normally considered disreputable when performed by others, it only works to affirm the predisposition of bigots. I guess you could sum it up — that as long as the acceptance of the practice of anti-Semitism is found to be advantageous for losers amongst both Christians and Jews — as well as Moslems and others, it will never go away.”

Ned: “Look, talking about Jews and anti-Semitism is entirely too controversial. As a Catholic, albeit, a non-practicing one, whatever I say can be misconstrued. So I for

one don't want to add to what you're saying. I can be damned as a bigot, whether or not I agree with what you're saying. But there's one thing I noticed — whenever Howy is called on for saying something stupid, which is pretty often, he brings up the Holocaust, Anti-Semitism, poor Israel, the Dreyfus business — along with an excuse for mentioning his paintings.”

Howy: “I don't think that's fair. And even if it's true, I think that your being aware of it, says something.”

Paul: “Well Howy, you just proved him right. But this doesn't make you, or even other Jews unique for using something as horrible as the Holocaust as a convenient excuse. Centuries of slavery and segregation for Blacks; of massacre and plundering for Amerinds; of debasing victimization for Latinos; persecution, hate-based isolation and even murder for homosexuals have all been used as excuses for one form or another of antisocial behavior by some members of those groups. So, since I believe that we Jews are no different than any other folks, I can't see that it makes us any less upstanding, if we too use a catastrophic happening to our people, as an excuse for our shortcomings as individuals. Moreover, I must admit, that Jews, as Westerners, benefited damn-near-as-much from the policies and practices of Europe's racist, Judeo-Christian colonizers as the most bigoted Texan, redneck, slave owner or murdering pioneer. All immigrants were beneficiaries of those early race-rationalized policies — which, to at least some extent, are continuing to this day.”

Howy: “You know what Paul, I think you're as anti-Semitic as Arafat. How can you possibly state that Jews were in any way responsible for segregation, the plundering of Indian lands, or bigoted actions against gays and Latinos?”

Paul: “I didn’t say that they were responsible — I said that they benefited from those activities. But I for one can’t say that by wealthy Jews, like the Rothschilds’ having loaned megabucks to the Brits, that they weren’t indirectly responsible for the British involvement in the slave trade and the racist-based, murder-maintained colonization of non-European, non-Judeo-Christian peoples.”

Ned: “Well, now you see why I stay clear of anything that has to do with Jews. If you, Paul, a born and barmitzvahed Jew can be accused of being anti-Semitic, when all you said is that Jews probably benefited indirectly, and a few even directly from the horrors inflicted on others by the Christian West, then, what can you expect I’d be called for saying the same thing.”

Tom: “Look, I always thought Howy was using the Jewish bit – the same way Gays, Blacks, Latinos, Amerinds and now women publicized the ill effects of past prejudice – in order to push his art. I think it’s wrong — but the art market being what it is, you have to do something to get publicity for your work.”

Ned: “That’s because there aren’t any art-based criteria for art. These days, art is all talk. Most of the art that I’ve been framing for the past ten or fifteen years looks to me like self-indulgent scribbles by incompetent neurotics. There’s no structure, no drawing, no paint quality — there’s only MFA-rationalized self-indulgent drivel. Sometimes I feel that I’m merely abetting a fraud when I frame a painting so well that it creates the illusion that the work is a valid work of art. But then I tell myself that that’s what framing is all about.”

Tom: “Well, I guess what you’re saying is that framers, like portrait painters are no different from hairdressers and cosmeticians. They get paid for building up the ego of the client.”



Act Two -- Scene Two

*Same setting -- One Week Later -- Well After
Midnight*

Seated around the tables are Ned, Tom and Paul

[An aura of pensive melancholy prevails. The only customers in the restaurant who can be seen are the three men. Every so often a busboy comes by with a pitcher of water to refill their glasses. The seat where Dory usually sits is piled up with wreaths and sprays of flowers. On the table is a vase with a bouquet of roses and a very large, prominently placed candelabra with numerous flickering candles. A few of Dory's paintings can be seen facing out towards the audience.]

Paul: “We should think of this merely as an example of our transitory state and the fragility of the human race. Dory's existence had a bountiful reality. At least she inferred as much. Obviously, when young, she was quite comely. Moreover, due to the manner in which she spoke of her husband, it was obvious, at least to me, that they had a passionate and fulfilling marriage. And, when she mentioned his demise, she appeared emotionally drained — despite its having occurred in the distant past. So, perhaps, instead of mourning her passing, we should celebrate the life she lived — it was so rich — she had so many friends and loved ones. Her good will was treasured by all whom she befriended. Not one of the homeless who frequented the park — not even the most confused or violent amongst them — were known to molest her — or to even offend her verbally. She was accepted because they knew she accepted them. Even when playing gin rummy with her — they never

evinced the slightest sign of animosity when she won — and she did so often. No matter how unlettered, and downtrodden the homeless — they were courteous when in her presence. One should think of her as the Mother Teresa to the ex-convicts, the homeless men and the downtrodden who frequented the park.”

Tom: “Ya know Paul, even though this is supposed to be a solemn occasion, and we’re only supposed to speak well of the dead, I think you’re laying it on a little too thick. And that’s because you’re always carried away by the sound of your own voice. I liked Dory. I bought a couple of her paintings because I thought it would help her out by putting a few extra dollars in her pocket. But when you compare her to Mother Teresa — you insult me, as a Catholic. The actions of Mother Teresa were those of a saint. She deserves beatification and will surely, in time, be declared a saint. So, as a Roman Catholic, despite the sorrow caused by Dory’s passing, I find comparing the day to day doings of hers, even though she was a good person, with those of the saintly Mother Teresa, an insult to all followers of the true church of Christ.”

Ned: “Look, Tom, I know you don’t get along with Paul, but this is not the time for you to start an argument with him. Dory’s death has affected all of us. And whether or not you like what Paul said — and I also think he overdid it — that’s Paul (*Ned makes a hand gesture towards Paul*) — and if he wants to express his feelings the way he does, let it be.”

Tom: “This has nothing to do with my likes or dislikes. And, it doesn’t bother me that he’s an Atheist who’s talking about Mother Teresa. It’s just that I don’t like him talking about things he knows nothing about — especially when it’s about one of the most godly and revered woman of our time.”

Paul: “I don’t understand why you show such animosity towards me. I can assure you, Tom, that I meant absolutely no insult to either the pious lady or to the Catholic Church.”

Ned: “Tom, you’re aware that I was also raised a Catholic – though not a strict one. Growing up we hardly ever went to church — and after communion I stopped going entirely. And, I doubt if I’ll ever return. — I’d have too much to confess. Yet, somehow or other, I still feel that I’m a Catholic — but a non-believing one. And I think you’re making a mountain out of a molehill. It’s obvious that Paul had no intention to blaspheme — or whatever you want to call it.”

Tom: “If you don’t accept Mother Teresa as a saintly person, I don’t know how you can consider yourself any kind of a Catholic. And, d’ya know, even though you and Dory were real good friends, I don’t understand why, if you really think you’re a Catholic, that you’re not put off by Paul’s bullshit — when he compares her to that great benefactor of mankind and angel of mercy.”

Paul: “Tom, there’s no question in my mind that Mother Teresa’s helping those Bengali lepers was of a selfless and idealistic nature. Nevertheless, I must confess my belief that the financial support and ballyhooing of Mother Teresa as a virtuous and saintly person, which I consider irrefutable, had more to do with the hubris of the West, than due to the good — that we all agree she did.”

Tom: “I can never tell exactly what you’re really saying. But, if it’s that she got money from her fellow Catholics to help the lepers, because it helped her to fulfill her obligation as a Christian — which is to convert the heathens, then I don’t see any reason to find fault.”

Ned: “It seems to me that few if any of those adorers of the angelic Mother Teresa — and I think, Tom, that you’re one of them, are aware of just what she did. But, I feel that her admirable work with the lepers, during the first eighteen years of her stay in India, all of which was accomplished with the permission of the Brit Raj and the financial support of the Church, in reality helped only a tiny segment of India’s masses. Perhaps, as a means of putting Mother Teresa’s doings in the proper light, we should take into consideration, that during one of the last years of the British occupation of India, while she was helping lepers and assisting in the conversion of some Brit-made poor — some two-to-three million Indians, in the same Indian Bengali-speaking states, where she functioned, were deliberately allowed to starve to death by the Brits. Now, every Irishman and American knows about the million of my forebear’s people who were knowingly, due to Brit greed, allowed to starve to death because they were Catholics. And, every literate person, the world over, has been made aware that six million Europeans were murdered by the Nazis because they were Jews. But few if any are aware that those millions of Indians were knowingly let starve to death by the racist Brits — because they were only Indians. All of which occurred while Mother Teresa was administering to but a relative handful of lepers and while the Nazis were engrossed in carrying out the “*final solution*”.

Paul: “I’d like to add to what you’ve said. But, you see, Ned, it’s just as difficult for me to speak negatively about anything to do with Christians as it was for you to refer to anything that might be deemed detrimental to Israel or to Jews, in general.”

Tom: “It’s never stopped you before, so let’s hear it.”

Ned: “He was talking to me, Tom. But you’ve just given him good reason for his reluctance to add to our conversation. (*Then, turning to Paul.*) What were you going to say about the Mother Teresa mystique?”

Paul: “I had no interest in furthering the discussion about the good Mother. What I wanted to mention was that her doings and angelic nature were being used for reasons other than those of a spiritual nature.”

Tom: (*belligerently butting in*) And just how, and why was Mother Teresa used — and, who used her?”

Ned: “For Christ’s sakes! Cut it out Tom. I want to hear what he has to say.”

Paul: “Thank you, Ned. (*then, turning to Tom*) Despite your antagonistic attitude — I’ll attempt to answer your question, which I believe was: why and by whom were Mother Teresa and her good deeds used? None of what I have to say is intended to make light of her contributions to the welfare of those impoverished souls whom she was so dedicated to help.”

Tom: “Why don’t you just say what you have to say, and stop all this bullshit.”

Paul: “Please, let me explicate in the manner I choose. There is no doubt in my mind that Mother Teresa and her good deeds are being used by the West’s new breed of greed-motivated, neo-colonist wannabes for the purpose of blurring the memory of the humiliation and economic enslavement engendered by their predecessors. Today we see blatant attempts to re-subjugate militarily-weaker, non-European nations — especially those whose people never converted to Christianity.”

Ned: “Paul, I hope you’re not laying this only on Christians. You know damn well, as you admitted, that Jews were involved — perhaps not directly, but economically, in many of the most nefarious doings of the West’s colonizers.”

Paul: “I’d be amongst the last to deny this. The reason why so many Jews refuse to accept this fact, is due to their belief that it will just add to the bigot’s rationale for his unwarranted anti-Semitic tirades.

Ned: “Yeah, I can understand that. But it does smack of hypocrisy when a Jew goes off about how Christians were so bad for using conversions as a means of securing the support of a colonized people — all so they could screw them out of their wealth — not that it isn’t true — but when Jews were also benefiting from it.”

Paul: “I’m not going to rationalize the fact that there were greed-based involvements by wealthy Jewish bankers and war profiteers. I believe Belmont, a Rothschild, made his fortune during the American Civil War. Nor can I deny that a Rothschild made a loan to the British Government during WWI, on condition that it support the Zionist movement — ergo, the Balfour statement (later euphemistically called a *Declaration* by Zionists to make it more authoritative). It seems that the Zionists wanted to touch all bases by having a leader of the corrupt and rapacious earthly British empire confirm the dictum of their God in Heaven — the bestower of their chosen status which entitled them to be the recipients of the Promised Land.”

Tom: “Because you’re an Atheist, you feel you can make fun of everything to do with religion. But just remember, the Nazis didn’t give a damn, whether or not you were an Atheist or one of God’s chosen. You could have been made

into soap by them just as well as me, despite my being a Catholic, or my mother, who also thought of herself as an Atheist.”

Paul: “I’ll be damned if I intend to have the deranged members of that Teutonic nation gone mad determine who and what I am — and how and what I think. And, if you’re so influenced by the results of that sick application of Mendel’s pea-based rationales for having deliberately — with Germanic efficiency — destroyed those millions of people related to your mother, whom you believe you, your mother and I have something in common with, then that’s your problem — not mine.”

Ned: “Hey, guys, this is supposed to be a memorial of sorts for Dory.”

Paul: “Perhaps it’s Dory’s demise that’s the very cause of our rather raucous discussion. Is not the awareness of the mortality of man the very reason for the invention of God and the subsequent establishment and maintenance of a coterie of free-loading witch doctors and their ilk. Can you imagine the rise in the unemployment numbers if God’s interveners were fired?”

Tom: “Jesus Christ, you don’t miss a chance to plug Atheism, do you?”

Ned: “I should probably stay out of this, but I must confess, not only did I stop being a practicing Catholic, but aside from considering myself an ethnic Irish Catholic — I haven’t even become an Agnostic, or even a free thinker. I’m now, no more, nor less than an Atheist. The whole business of God, heaven, hell, confession, pope and priesthood – have all become no more than Mickey Mouse to me. This doesn’t mean I think Atheism’s for everyone. If

belief in a God or Gods makes it easier for some folks to accept the uncertainties of life and the finality of death — then, so be it. Today, because of my state of awareness, I'd be lying to myself, if I claimed to be a Catholic, or even an agnostic. I've come to believe that I've always been part of this particular universe — and that I couldn't get away from it if I wanted to."

Tom: "I guess being an ethnic Irish-Catholic Atheist is like being an Atheist who's an ethnic Protestant, Jew, Moslem, Buddhist, Hindu, Sikh, Confucian or whatever. But I don't understand how an Atheist can account for the presence of a soul. And, anyone who's been around the dead body of someone he's known well, must have wondered where that something that gave the body its presence went."

Paul: "Do you know, Tom, sometimes I think that I've underestimated your intelligence. Your thoughts regarding the transmigration of the soul are at the very roots of theological controversy."

Ned: "Ya know, all of this started because you compared Dory's angelic qualities with those of the saintly Mother. There's no question in my mind that by your doing so you meant no disrespect for either her or the Church. And I find no fault with your assumption that the financial support she received had more to do with the racist rationales for colonialism, than for the propagation of the faith. And, let's not forget, that the West's most prestigious award, the Nobel peace prize, was given to the saintly Mother — and not to India's Mahatma Gandhi: the moral force behind the peaceful ousting of the West's colonizers — as well as the model for both Nelson Mandela and Martin Luther King in their efforts to free the oppressed minorities in both America and South Africa. So, although I too think you went overboard when you compared Dory to the pious lady,

I think it was only an error of degree — and hardly the kind of sin required to be Hail Maryed away.”

Tom: “You’re worse than Paul. Because you were born a Catholic, you feel you can poke fun of it, in any way you want. You make me feel sorry I ever questioned Paul’s comparing Dory to Mother Teresa.”

Ned: “For want of a better term, I consider myself an Atheist. I’m not an Agnostic, because I’m damned sure there is no God, and there’s no afterlife — at least in the sense that I have or am an entity, either physical or mental, that remains intact — either here on earth or up somewhere in the stratosphere or deep in the bowels of the earth. But this does not contradict my belief that I am, and will always be an integral part of our cosmos — along with all my fellow beings — human and otherwise.”

Paul: “I can’t say that I disagree with you in any material way. I think all religions, and by that I mean ALL religions, were created to give a purpose to life. And, this was necessitated by our becoming questioning beings. All of which occurred as our life expectancy increased from that of unthinking fornicators, to caring adults.”

Ned: “Sure, I can deal with that. It’s said that elephants are puzzled by the death of one of their own — and they can live damn near as long as we do now. And, I recall how some years ago, when I was still married, we had a cat that had her first litter. When one of them died, she brought it to my wife to fix. Death has always been a problem for all thinking beings to accept.”

Tom: “Ya know, you guys can philosophize all you want, but men far smarter and far more knowledgeable than either of you have decided that men have souls. And, I remember

seeing a simple mathematical formula that proves that there's a soul."

Ned: "I thought that, as a good Catholic, I wasn't allowed to question the answers to the questions posed in my catechism. And I don't remember anything about a scientific formula for proving the existence of a soul. And since you now claim to be a practicing and devout Catholic, how come you found the need to substantiate your belief in its existence?"

Paul: "Count me out. No way will I get involved in this."

Tom: "Just as well, Paul. But I'm gonna pose this question to both of you anyway. And, that's what's the "X", the unknown in the following equation?"

Ned: "Hey, I never took a course in math — and I don't know algebra from Algeria. The only reason I stayed in college long enough to get an MFA was to evade the draft. I didn't want to go to Vietnam anymore than Bush did."

Paul: "Tom, you never cease to amaze me. I never thought of you as a high IQ person who majored in Math."

Tom: "I'm not. And, I didn't have the money to go to college; or Bush's connections and I wasn't smart enough to get a scholarship for Oxford like Clinton. So, to escape the tail end of the draft for the Korean War, I took off for Cuba where the living was cheap. I stayed there until the war was over and they stopped drafting."

Ned: "Let's stop rationalizing the way we avoided the draft, and get on with your proof that men really have souls. But if you insist on showing it as an equation, keep it simple."

Tom: “I think it’s agreed that when a man dies he loses his life force. And it’s that life force that’s considered our soul.”

Paul: “Yes, I believe that those religions with roots in India: Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism have incorporated that supposition into their dogma. In those faiths, upon death, the soul (or as they call it the atman) leaves the body and either becomes as one with another living being, or joins with the universal and eternal spirit (which I believe is called the Brahma). And, I might add, that by explaining the soul in algebraic terms makes complete sense — because, I believe that those mathematical innovations that allowed for it had its origins in India.”

Ned: “For Christ’s sake. Stop showing how smart you are, and let Tom finish. I’d really like to know if there can really be proof that we have a soul.”

Tom: “Okay, If everyone’s through bullshitting, I’ll continue. This is how it was explained to me: If **Y** is the living being, and **Z** is the dead one — than it’s obvious that something tangible, an **X** which can be called a soul or a life force — or whatever you want to call it, exists.”

Ned: “Okay, so what your saying is that **Y**: the living being, less **X**: the soul, equals **Z**: the dead being. I guess you could reverse that and say that the body plus the soul **X** equals the living being.”

Tom: “That’s just what I’m saying. And, since both of you guys think everything has to be scientifically accounted for, and since the unknown **X** (which I call a soul) surely exists — then **X**, as such, can change form — but it can never be lost. Now, tell me: how the hell can either of you say that

there's no such thing as a soul?"

[As the door opens, a gust of wind blows across the stage
extinguishing the candles on the candelabra.]



II

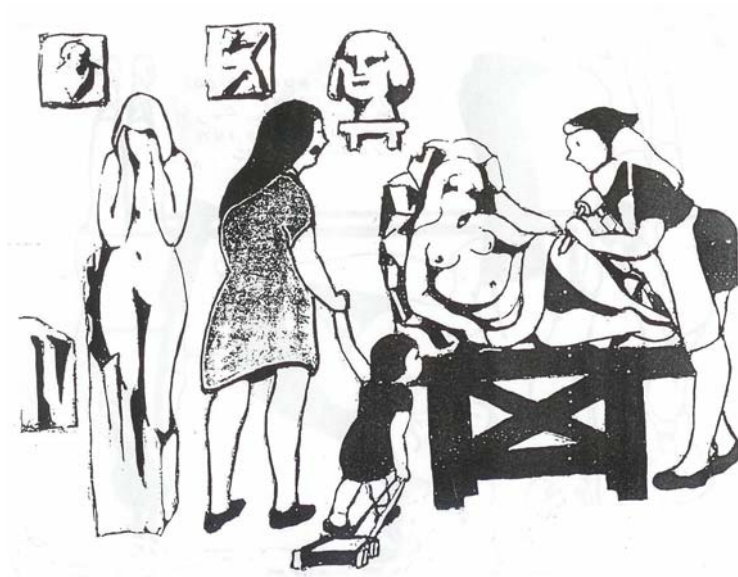
TOONS

The New York Art Scene

From before the influx of MFAs:
in the late mid-1960's

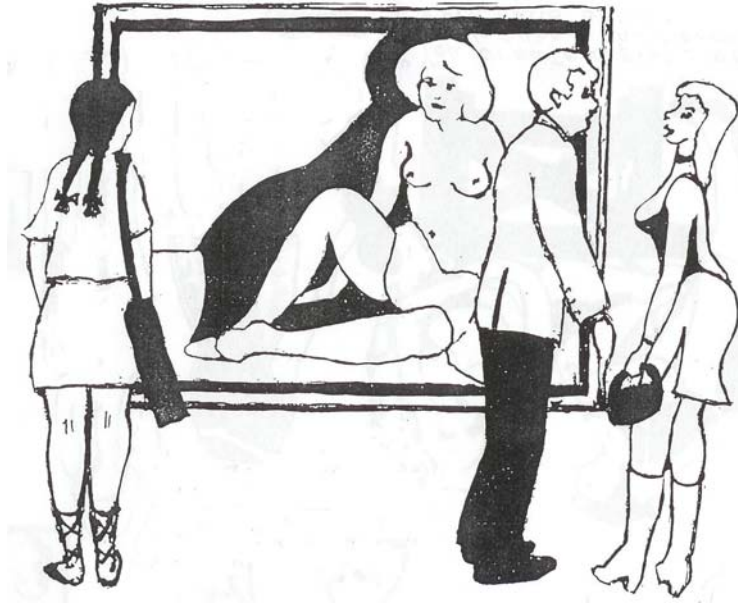
Until the mid-1980's:
the beginning, in earnest, of the
gentrification of the city





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“You create a piece of sculpture. And I created this little child.”



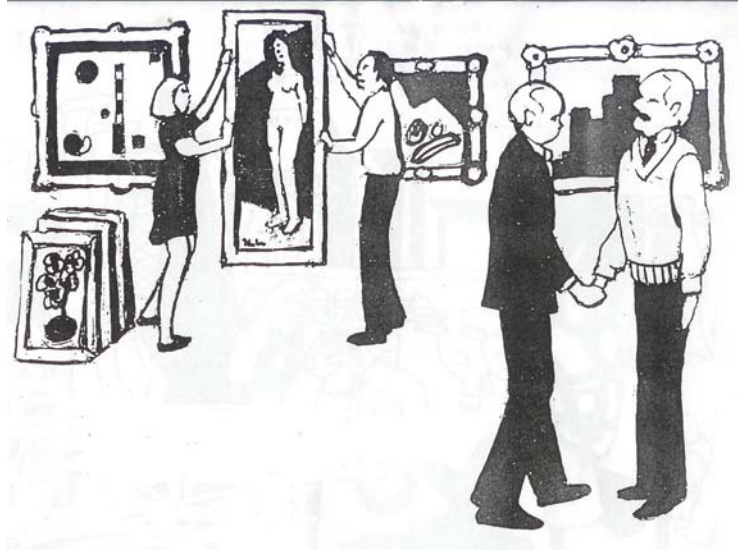
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“I could never understand why anyone would want to look at a painting of a nude”



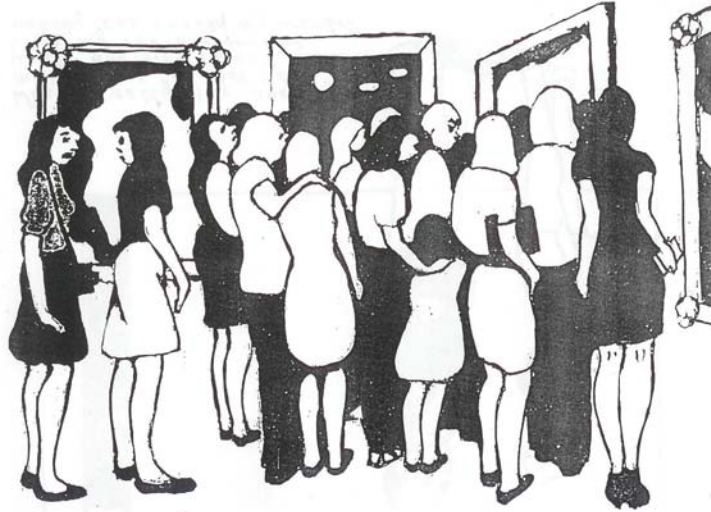
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“Perhaps, we’d get a better grade of free-loader to our openings – if we served a better grade of wine.”



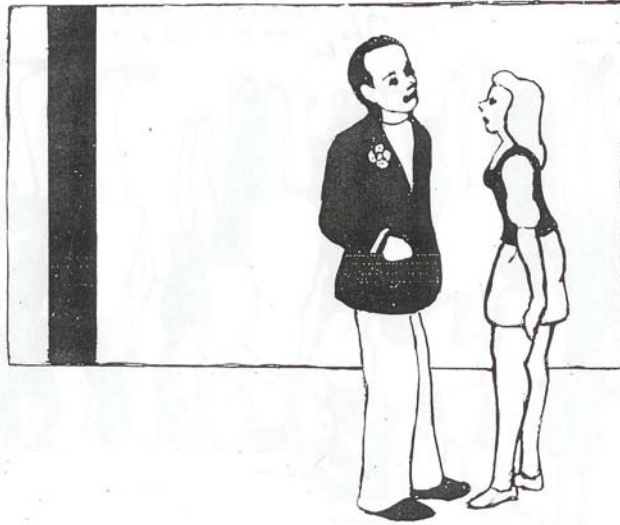
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“Okay, it’s agreed. This time you get the first prize and I get the second prize.”



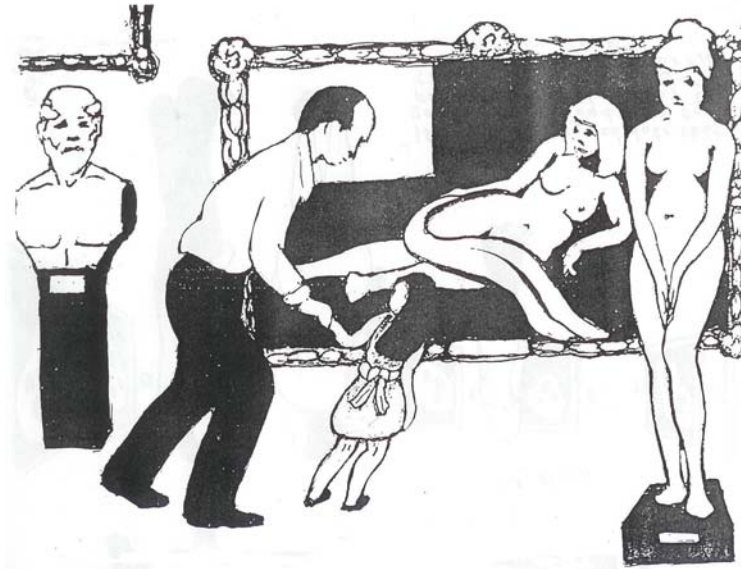
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“I can’t see the paintings —
but at least I can hear the guide.”



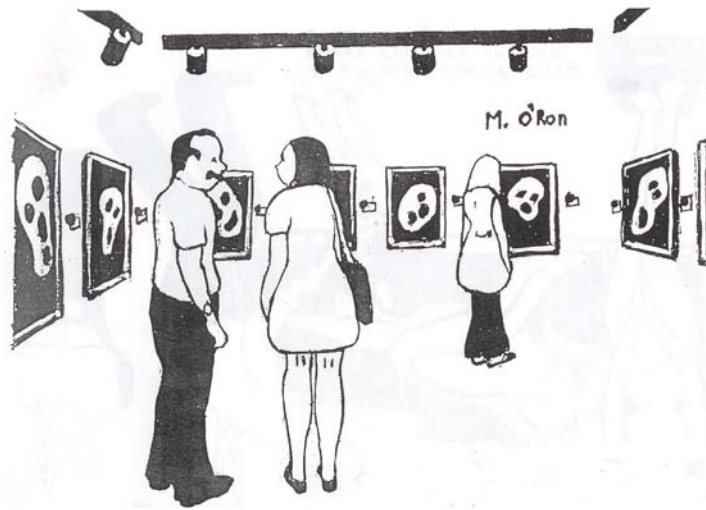
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“what I really like about minimal art — is that I can write anything I want to in my review — and nobody can refute my words.”



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“Dad, why didn’t they wear clothes
in the olden days?”



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“If all the phony red dots that galleries placed next to paintings really meant that the works were sold – there wouldn’t be a broke artist in the city.”



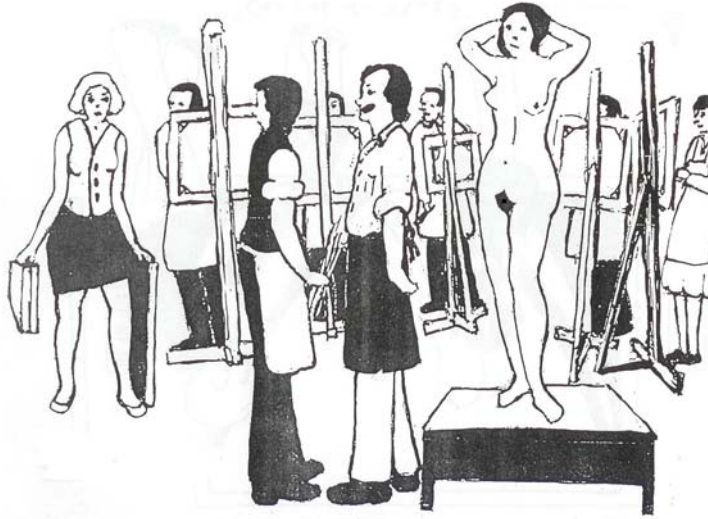
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“It was my shrink who first made me aware of my talent as an artist.”



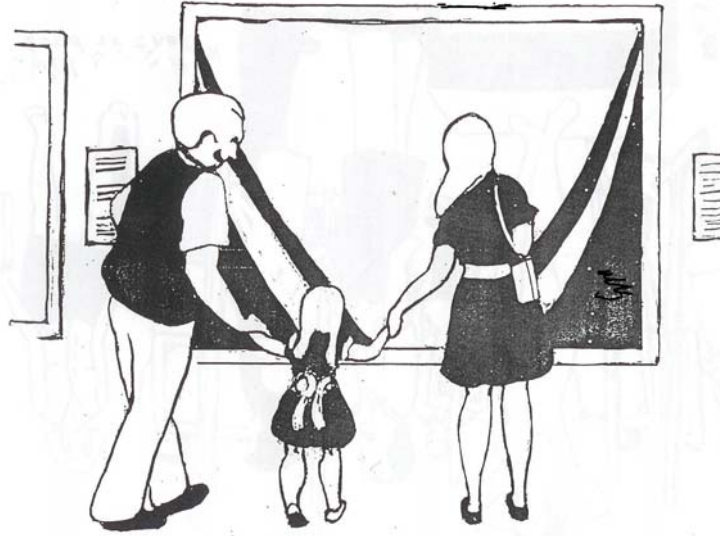
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“The bank lets some depositor’s wife hang her paintings — but they hire a professional window washer.”



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"Will you get a load of that!"



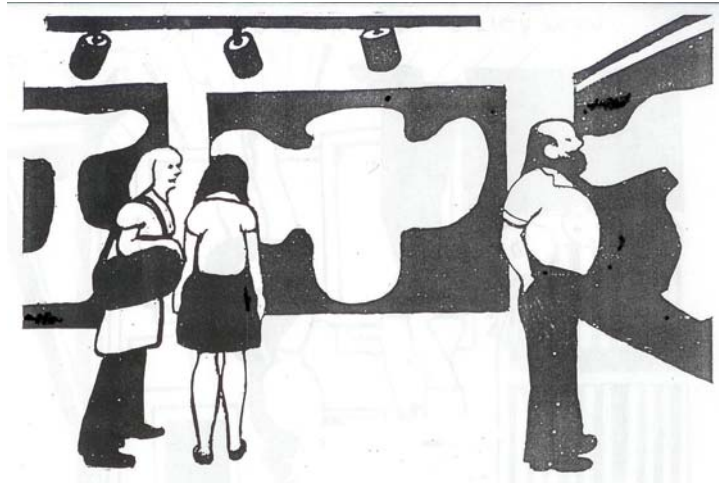
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“Can you do that?”



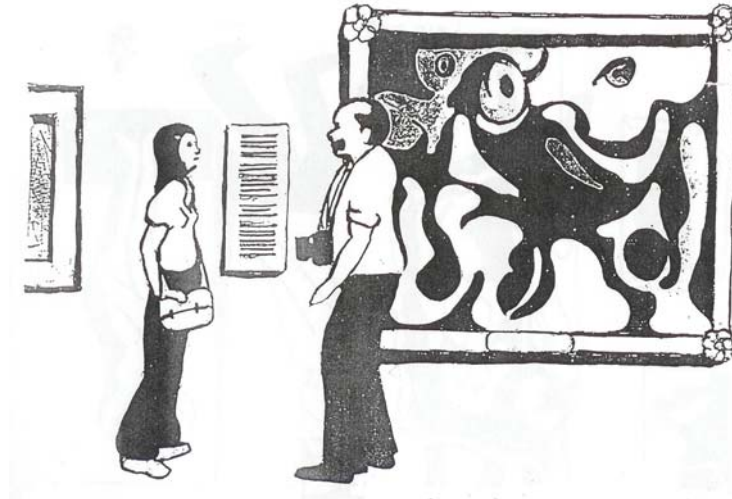
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"I can make you a rich man!"



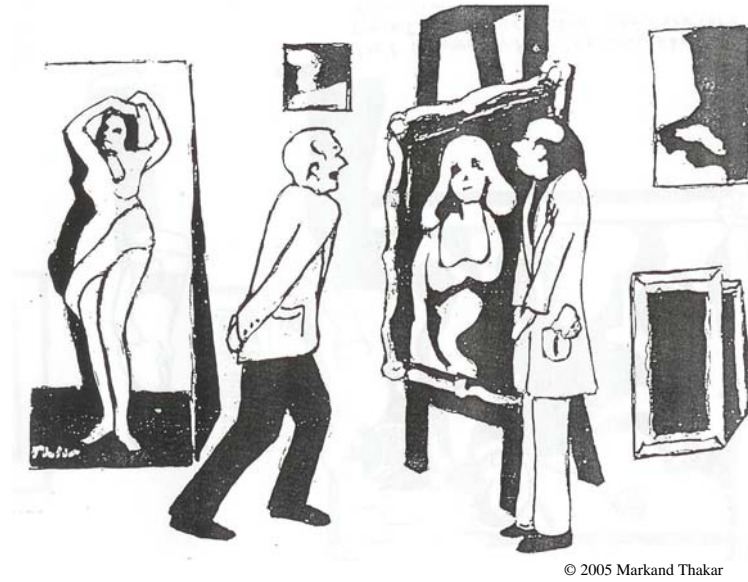
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“He decided to make his paintings more timely – he’s renaming the series, the scourge of AIDS, instead of the rape of Vietnam.”



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“Isn’t it wonderful the way that the painting illustrates the curator’s theories on art.”



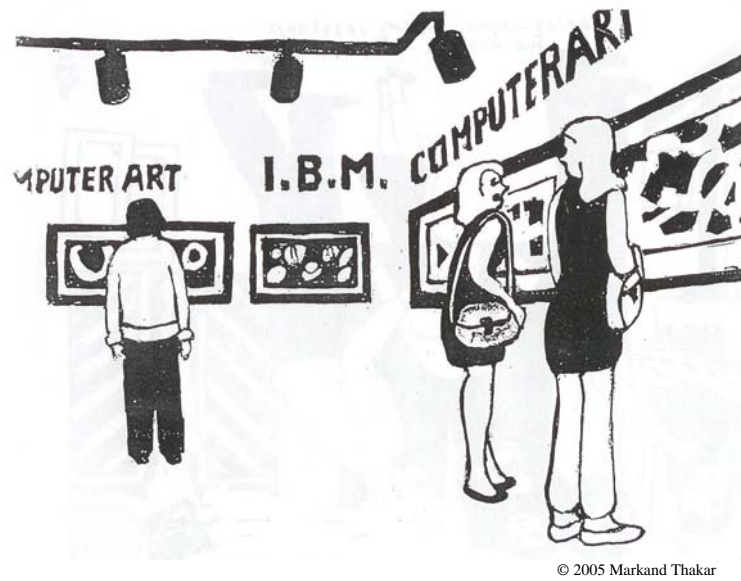
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"How many coats of paint did you use?"



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“I’d like you to give my daughter watercolor lessons.”



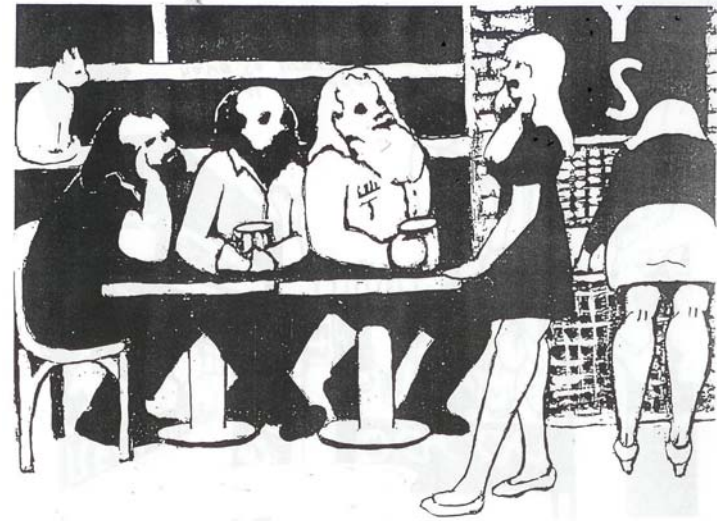
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“Ten thousand BFA graduates every year —
now this.”



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“With the recorders we don’t have to waste our time looking at the unimportant paintings.”



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“My shrink says that you men become artists so you can have fame, fortune and sex.”

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III

The Gathering On The Grass

[Over a period of a dozen years, since 1991 the writer has spent some three-and-a-half years in India. During that time he traveled extensively throughout the Subcontinent, spending a good part of it in what has recently been renamed Mumbai by the Maharashtra and Indian governments. The British (as do many Indian Anglophiles) insist on calling it Bombay – no doubt for the same reason that residents of Italy could persist in calling London, Londinium – in order to dwell on their country's long-since-gone days of glorious conquest of alien lands – which were also murderously acquired.]

*

The attending members of this particular, ever-changing, amorphous get-together of twenty or more of Mumbai's seemingly-countless, Indian poets and poetry-minded literati, were of a mixed lot. The party heading it all up, and without whom the group would no doubt cease to exist (at least in its present form), was a scholarly and worldly Indian gentleman – a Parsi writer and poet. The meetings were held once a week, in the open air, on the grass, fronting one of South Mumbai's splendid performing arts buildings. It was there that the discussions of various

aspects of poetry, written in, or translated into English, took place.

Ordinarily, the overwhelming majority of those attending the readings were resident Indians; and what they had in common (besides an interest in poetry) was their having traveled abroad: to Europe and America or to one of the Anglo-dominated English-speaking nations – and, if they hadn't, they wanted to. Prior to the American and British invasion of Iraq in March of 2003, virtually all were unconditionally Ameriphiles or Anglophiles – when not both. As to their socio-economic backgrounds, virtually all belonged to India's middle- to upper-middle-class – which meant that they were, at the very least, literate and bilingual.

Since these gatherings occurred in South Mumbai, Parsis (though as individuals) were a significant presence. Another notable grouping of resident Indians in attendance were the descendants of Raj-era converts to Christianity: mainly Catholics with roots in Kerala and Goa.

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During the primary years of British influence (the century or so prior to 1947: the year the citizens of the Subcontinent finally rid themselves of the Raj's domination), the average Hindu and Moslem, due to their belonging to large, potentially-troublesome communal blocs, were often hindered, when not barred, from partaking in any major way in the building of a modern-day India: a land that empire-minded Brits had had no intention of ever relinquishing.

On the other hand, Raj-era, Anglo-Indians: usually the legitimate and illegitimate offspring of low-ranking British troops and officials, were routinely given jobs with

government-run organizations – notably in India’s vast railroad system. Moreover (despite their almost never being accepted by their Euro-Caucasian relations – whether or not the issue of legally-wedded Indian wives or concubines and whores), since they had been given preference, job-wise, by the Brits, their conversion to Christianity could be expected. In addition, in Goa, Catholics (proselytized Hindus), which included those whose female ancestors had been impregnated by the Portuguese invaders (Moorish, or not), were also given special privileges that enabled them to lord it over Indian-Goa’s still-Hindu residents.

*

There are really only two kinds of resident Indians: the *Haves*, a sizable number of whom had ancestors who, by kissing-up-to-the-Raj, had benefited monetarily and prestige-wise during the British occupation of the Subcontinent – many of whom are pro-everything Western; and then, there are the *Have-Little-or-Nothings*, whose ancestors tend to have followed one or the other of the many religions practiced by the Indian peoples who had populated the Subcontinent prior to the arrival (euphemistically called colonization) of Europe’s Judeo-Christian, Bible-rationalizing, greed-motivated invaders. Yet, some of those pre-colonization-era Indians, despite their poverty (though mainly the more citified) show signs of being very pro-Western.

The Ancient Indus valley civilization had existed for millennia prior to the earliest known invasions by the no-doubt-murdering-and-raping Sanskrit-speaking Aryans (which probably began nearly four thousand years ago). And running all through and during the murderous and rapacious invasions by Arab, Turkic and Mogul Moslems, genetic and cultural inputs (despite a time-to-time, horrendous, killing spree inspired by proselytizing resident

Islamic religious fanatics) were absorbed by and exchanged between members of each new group of alien intruding peoples and the previously-Indianized peoples of the Subcontinent. However, since the invaders ended up losing far more of their foreign identity than they contributed to that of India's ancient culture, the identity of the Subcontinent's people, though affected to some extent, remained more-or-less constant – and each new group of invaders, whether intruders or guest peoples, no matter what their religion or ethnicity, ended up becoming a culturally near-indistinguishable (to the Western eye) sub-group of Indians. And, despite the wealth of the then-resident Indian people being constantly taxed, looted or allocated to the members of each new group of migrating invaders, since the aggressors and their entourage remained in India, so did India's riches. This was to change with the arrival of the employees of entrepreneurial Europeans (whether or not government sponsored); all that was required of them, the Subcontinent's new intruders, was that they return a profit (by whatever means necessary) sufficient to compensate their sponsoring employers for the risk to their capital investment.

*

An Anglo-Indian's willingness to accept Christianity was facilitated by the fact that amongst Indians, a child's status was and still is determined by his father's caste (though some Westernized Indians are known to also take into consideration prevalent, worldwide, ethnic and racial biases). The negative effects for Hindu India of those conversions to Christianity stem from the reality that most of those colonial-era adherents accepted, without dispute, the demonizing of Hinduism – along with a denial of India's ancient culture. What's more, Europe's wide-ranging missionaries managed to convince their proselytized acolytes of the superiority of every aspect

(sans its warts) of the West’s Judeo-Christian culture – over that of all others.

[Though, there had been Brits, and apparently not only Indophiles, with the integrity to tell it as it really was – by the latter part of the nineteenth century the British intellectual with integrity had become an endangered species; with the advent of the late-Victorian era, educated Englishmen tended to follow the rationalized party line for empire: “white-man’s burden”, and all that stuff.]

*

During the occupation of India by the Brits, a relatively few Iranis (mainly Zoroastrians and Jews), Armenian-Christians and a miscellany of other nationals (none known to have had a political base in either India, England or their own homeland) were permitted, if not encouraged to reside in the Subcontinent. And, when not given preference, they were nevertheless not prohibited from engaging in economic ventures. All of which occurred primarily in those port cities where the Brits exercised the most stringent economic and political control.

Parsis (though Zoroastrians much like many of those new-comer Iranis) were a different matter. Parsis first entered India well-over a thousand years back (slightly later than when the British Isles were being subjected to the massive invasion by its German and Scandinavian neighbors – which, as few Indians were made aware, brought about the Germanic roots of the English language). The Parsis settled in Gujarat, which accounts for their speaking Gujarati, the Indic language that many Parsis now consider their natural tongue – though Mumbai’s well-educated Parsis (and most are) also speak Hindi and English.

[Nevertheless, religious rituals held in their Fire Temples – entrance to which (throughout Hindu India) is banned to all non-Parsis – are said to be spoken in an ancient Persian tongue – which few followers understand. (Gibberish seems to be the most-effective, spoken language of all religions).]

Mumbai, said to be the area's pre-Portuguese and pre-Brit-era name, now part of Maharashtra, was, as Bombay, turned into a major deep-water port by the Brits. Then, due to Bombay's domination of the sea trade on India's northwest seacoast, Gujarat's more-northern, old seaports were soon made obsolete – which resulted in its traders and merchants migrating south to Bombay – which was in the process of becoming that area's new mercantile center. As a result, many Gujarati-Hindu and Gujarati-speaking-Parsi merchants were to converge on Bombay, which, at the time, was administered by the Brits as one with Gujarat.

[Parsis had been permitted to settle in India providing, as was agreed, that they would not proselytize, or consort with, the Indian population. And, although the Zoroastrian religion that they had left behind in Iran/Persia had no prohibitions regarding intermarriage or conversion, in India (no doubt to comply with the requirements set out by the Hindu rulers in Gujarat), Parsis only married Parsis. A similar tradition has been followed by Orthodox Hasidic Jews, who continue to wear the same outfit that they were required to wear by Christian rulers, and they too steadfastly adhere to a long since abandoned legal requirement. Although complying with a forced-on-them tradition has only caused Hassidic Jews to be attired in clothing that appears ludicrous to others, Parsis, by their complying with a forced-on-them tradition, which caused a centuries-long tradition of intermarriage, have acquired a genetic degeneration which affects a sizable number of them. Many modern-day Parsis, aware of this, have married outside their faith. However, anyone coming

across a broad section of India's Parsi population couldn't help but notice that over the centuries (which may have mitigated some of the ill effects of intermarriage) a certain amount of hanky-panky must have taken place. (And this observation could apply to all groups claiming a purity of race.)]

Modern-day Parsis tend to stress their ability to express themselves in the King's English. This may very well be their way of showing an appreciation for their having received better treatment from the Brits than had their fellow Indians. However, these days, it smacks of an attempt by some Parsis to disassociate themselves from their Moslem and Hindu countrymen. Nevertheless, most Parsis realize that, although they tend to be fairer (color-wise) than most other Indians, they are Indian – and Indo-Aryan at that. But they also take pride in their having been almost accepted by the Raj. However, with few exceptions, even that begrudging acceptance was only on a par with the lower socio-economic strata of Europeans.

[In the book, "Mother India" (a Brit-sponsored, racist rationalization for colonialism published in the late 1920's – it was praised by the New York Times and damned by the Yale review as "An offensive and distorted picture of India.") singled Parsis out as being better Indians than their Hindu and Moslem counterparts.]

*

In recent years the world has witnessed innumerable rationalizations of horrific doings, e.g., the massacre of seven to eight thousand Moslems by Christian Serbs at Srebrenica, as Dutch peace-keepers stood by; and the hateful attack of 9/11 by fanatical Moslems on New York's World Trade Center. Even the rationalization and outright denial of the proven killing of multi-millions of civilians (Jews,

Gypsies, the sickly and others) who were considered unfit to live by Nazi Germany, can be heard.

[Although, the racism-motivated, years-long, unlawful internment of some six-hundred-plus, non-Euro-Caucasian prisoners of war in Guantanamo, might seem slight in comparison to the other horrors being rationalized, when one considers that this is being performed, and then rationalized by a nation once considered the benefactor of the free world, it is significant. Let us hope – despite his reelection, that it's but a temporary lapse of judgment by the American people that has caused them to continue to give their support to the neo-fascist actions of an ultra-conservative, born-again Christian, religious fanatic.]

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Allowing for the significant presence of two minority groups: Parsis and Christians, the majority of those attending the poetry readings consisted of a miscellany of well-educated resident Indians and NRIs (**Non-Resident Indians**), as well as non-Indian, English-speaking residents and visitors.

Since there were no rigid guidelines as to what could be discussed, as long as it was about poetry and poets, when the Parsi gentleman (who normally ran it and who had given it its form) was absent, much that was kicked around was merely self-indulgent prattle – or propagandistic diatribe.

When the Parsi gentleman was present, if the individual selected to lead a discussion lapsed into a self-serving harangue, he would politely admonish the offending party. However, in his absence, it was a rare event when an individual presenting the evening's program was ever prevented from prattling on about his or her pet inanity.

Nevertheless, despite the frequency of those ludicrous presentations, at times they made for thought-provoking diversions.

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It was only possible to make a wide-ranging guess as to the age (something around thirty or forty years) of the claiming-to-be-a-devout-Catholic woman who, at every opportunity, attempted to proselytize. That this woman who was so intent on converting the heathens, was allowed, in the Parsi gentleman's absence, to have a full evening to give free rein to do her thing, didn't come as a surprise – her poorly-paid (some would say for good reason) reviews of movies in English, and articles about Mumbai were being published. Although she seemed sincere enough in her boundless belief in the Holy Trinity, and all its ritualistic and biblical embellishments, she was so intent on presenting Catholicism as the only true religion, that she, either intentionally or through ignorance, presented a completely distorted account of the making of the Bible and of Christianity's beginnings. Her acting as if superior to all others in attendance, appeared due to her oriented-to-the-West's religious beliefs – which had required her blind acceptance, as fact, of the same kind of nonsensical assumptions one associates with every ism known to man.

The lady's unquestioning belief resembled that of: Nazis' claiming to belong to a master race; Fundamentalist Christians and Orthodox Jews due to their claims of being a chosen people; high-caste Hindus due to their claims of being superior to their lesser-reborn brethren; and Wasp-Americans due to the fancied belief in their being superior to their nation's other hyphenated ethnics.

[It should also be noted, that at one time or another, in just about every ism's history, their followers used their beliefs

to rationalize their engaging in one or another of mankind's more horrific doings.]

The missionary-in-mufti's features were regular enough (some might even consider her pretty). Nevertheless, since it became obvious, as the evening of her harangue wore on, that the overly-saccharine aura she imparted (as she went about praising the virtues of Catholicism to the abasement of all other beliefs), was merely a ploy to foster her proselytizing agenda – which was, perhaps, for far more personal reasons: those having nothing to do with religion – but to an inferiority complex: the result of her racial makeup, which appeared to be an olio of Indian and blackamoor-cum-Portuguese.

When granted her evening, rather than give a reading and follow it with a discussion of her subject, the lady distributed various tracts from the Bible – requesting each recipient to read one aloud – as she called on them to do so. Since every passage was in praise of some aspect of Catholicism (or a censure of other beliefs) – it was obvious that her intent was to make catechumens out of all the “Heathens” present. Whether feigned or real, she evinced an attitude that as a Catholic, she was entitled to lord it over believers of all other religions (a universal attitude that's also projected by certain hypocritical followers of just about every belief or ism). As the evening wore on, due to the outflow of an obviously-concocted, Christian goodness – she took on the semblance of a used-car dealer, or a rice-distributing missionary. The more she spoke, the more her personality overwhelmed her otherwise-attractive features: ultimately making her appear an extremely ugly person. The result was, that instead of enhancing the attendees' perception of Catholicism – she made it laughable.

In no way was this particular lady's demeanor identical to that of India's Catholic population. Nevertheless, India's

colonial-era converts to Catholicism (Anglicanism runs it a close second) seem far more alienated from their ancient, Indian, cultural roots than do those of any other non-Hindu-affiliated religion.

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[When poverty prevails, and jobs are hard to come by, being a clergyman is a good deal – and then there’s a plethora of intelligent and worldly applicants wishing to serve their God(s). These days, in most wealthier nations, there are far fewer qualified folks willing to devote their lives to spreading the words of their God. This is not true in less prosperous nations, such as India – where a better life on Earth is what draws so many candidates to devote their lives to administering to the spiritual needs of their fellow believers.]

As a result, the term rice-Christian should not be applied solely to those impoverished individuals enticed to convert to Christianity – but also to their once-Heathen clergy. In addition, since so many folks, worldwide, have a vested interest (the sole means of their economic survival) in selling religious dogma of one sort or another, it’s no wonder so many clergymen willingly and unquestioningly adhere to the fundamentalist’s ignorance-based, narrow-minded interpretations of their religion’s venerated texts.]

*

Early Christianity, by the time of its near-total divergence from Old Testament Judaism, had incorporated into its code of ethics, some of the sense of right and wrong found in the ancient cultures of South and East Asia (Confucius-China; Buddhist- and Jaina-India) as well as that of Zoroastrian-Afghanistan/Persia – all of which, in Greece, were amalgamated with the already-absorbed-by-them cultural

inputs from Sumer, Mesopotamia, Egypt, Crete, the Cyclades, Tuscany and that of the Near East's Indo-Europeans. In later centuries, those leading up to modern times, a goodly portion of those ethical values: now seen as a kind of non-denominational form of Christianity (and as a totally Western concept – in many aspects it's become just that), were and are in the process of being absorbed (though often reluctantly) into the cultures of virtually every redeveloping, developing and wannabe-developed nation. And it's an awareness of this that's causing the fundamentalists of every religion to speak out (and for some to take up arms) against its intrusion on their beliefs.

This encroachment on the born-to beliefs of many non-Judeo-Christians – of even the currently watered-down form of Christianity advocated by the West's economically-developed nations – has caused resentment of the West by a goodly portion of the world's peoples. Moreover, the touting of the 2003, oil-cum-greed-motivated war of aggression by America's Republican administration, as being a beneficent doing of a Christian people, makes America appear to be a nation of hypocrites (as well as bullies). And now, in ever-growing numbers, America's citizens, as well as those from her tag-along allies, have joined knowledgeable people, the world over, who are in the process of being convinced that modern-day Judeo-Christianity has become nothing more than a doctrine of convenience – which allows for its advocates and followers to rationalize, in the name of their God, some of mankind's more heinous activities. This, with the only proviso, that they serve to make money.

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Orthodox Jews, as do America's Fundamentalist Christians and as did South Africa's Protestant Boers (Bible-rationalizing, racist bigots all) claim a heritage from the Old Testament's begotting Hebrews. But, until the advent of the

Jewish Holocaust, being a Jew for many was said to be merely a state of mind. However, the horrors of the Holocaust convinced even a majority of those folks who had heretofore rejected every aspect of Judaism, that somehow or other Jews were indeed a racially-identifiable people. And, (especially after its being emphasized again and again by way of Israeli propaganda – and stressed as a negative by neo-Nazi types and losers of every stripe) those who said that it was nonsense, were then considered: cowards, traitors to their (nonexistent?) race, or anti-Semites.

[All isms rely on a certain degree of brainwashing to motivate their followers into believing as they do; and, in nearly all instances the concept of racism plays at least some part – if not by its founder – then for sure by its zealous proponents.]

Despite being blessed with a gene pool probably no more, nor less diversified than that of any of Europe's present-day Mediterranean and Germano-Slavic peoples, Jews were demeaned as mongrels by Germany's WWII leaders. Having caricatured Jews in this way as a means of dehumanizing them (somewhat similar means were employed by the British and other colonizing peoples when rationalizing their stealing the land and subjugating the peoples of militarily-weaker nations), the Germans went about confiscating their property, while attempting to exterminate them as an identifiable people.

[Perhaps Hitler was aware of Henry VIII's kicking the Catholic Church out of England before confiscating its lands and moneys – and coincidentally killing off those who didn't go along with his doings.]

Notwithstanding the worldwide expressions of guilt by Christian Euro-Caucasians for their having allowed the

horrors of the Holocaust to have taken place, within a decade or so after the end of WWII, anti-Semitism was on the rise – and both Christians and Jews (though, perhaps to a lesser degree) were responsible for it.

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During the pre- and early-WWII years, due to a somewhat general acceptance of Nazi-Germany's condemnation of Jews by a majority (silent or otherwise) of European Christians – many Jews began to look at themselves objectively – through the eyes of others. (Keep in mind, that it wasn't until after the war that a full awareness of the horrors of the Holocaust came to light.) Although there was a general belief amongst thinking Jews, and not a totally-unfounded one, that anti-Semitism had its roots in the teachings of Christian clergy, wherein they (despite the improbability of Europe's modern-day ethnic Jews having any appreciable, if that, genetic connection to those biblical Hebrews) were held responsible for the crucifixion of Jesus, they realized that certain negative traits attributed to them were too close to reality to be ignored. This caused a broad-based soul-searching (i.e., "What Makes Sammy Run") by primarily non-religious individuals with Jewish ancestry. The result was, that during the years leading up to America's involvement in WWII, during it, and the years immediately following, Jews, in general, avoided overt involvement in any of those activities thought capable of justifying anti-Semitic attitudes. And, claims of their being "chosen of God" or any mention of Hanukkah during Christmastime, were, at the very least, not voiced in the presence of non-Jews.

Displays by some Jews of a belief in their having an intellectual superiority, especially when augmented by their often being considered overly competitive, notably in money matters, were determined by American Jews to be

major contributory factors to the existence of the kind of virulent anti-Semitism that was prevalent, at the time, in much of Europe. As a result, more-aggressive Jews made a conscious effort to be regular guys (which was all that the majority of all Jews, at least until 1967, ever wanted to be). And, with the absence of a pro-Semitism during WWII, displays of an anti-Semitic nature, though surely not eradicated, markedly abated.

[There was a major exception. During WWII, Catholic Ireland (as did India's Gandhi), due to England's historical subjugation of her people, remained neutral. This, in effect, allowed Nazi Germany to maintain a significant presence on the borders of the UK. In addition there never was a publicized Papal denunciation of Hitler's persecution of Europe's Jews (or Gypsies, for that matter). Perhaps, as a means of allowing those Irish-American Catholics who cling to their ethnic roots to rationalize Ireland's refusal to join with the Allies in their fight against Nazi Germany, New York's Catholic Parochial schools (most of whose students were ethnic-Irish) came to rationalize Ireland's neutrality by stressing the Church's depiction of Jews as Christ killers – along with Hitler's most denigrating concept of Jews. (Papa Kennedy appeared to have been of a like mind.)

[By the turn into the twenty-first century, in reaction to the universally accepted conclusion that the Papacy had failed to speak out against the perpetration of the Holocaust, Pope John Paul admonished Catholics to disregard any anti-Jewish sentiments that were, or might have been, formerly propagated by the Church.]

Much as most of today's Buddhists (of whom, only a tiny fraction are now Indian) and virtually all others, are ignorant of, or deny Buddha's Hindu-Indian heritage – and run-of-the-mill Jews are ignorant of or deny that Moses

must have been a non-Hebrew Egyptian (though there's no historical evidence that he actually lived) – most Christians are either ignorant of, or choose to ignore the fact that Christ and all of His disciples, as well as virtually all the followers of Christianity during the first centuries following His crucifixion, had ancestors who had, or had themselves been brought up in the Jewish faith.

Assuming that the Gospels actually tell it like it was (all were written or rewritten from hearsay some fifty or more years after the Crucifixion was said to have taken place, by men who had never seen Jesus), it would not be inappropriate to assume that it was the Romans who were far more responsible for His Crucifixion – than the relatively powerless, bigoted religious leaders of an ultra-religious segment of Palestinian Jews. As a consequence, it would make sense, that after having been persecuted by one or another ruler of the Roman Empire, that Christians (despite the fact that a goodly portion still had ancestors who had been born to the Jewish faith) had, three centuries after Christ's crucifixion, formulated a scenario that made light of Roman culpability. After all, it's doubtful that Emperor Constantine (who wasn't baptized until the day he died in 337 AD) would have been so accepting of Catholicism (whether or not for political reasons) had the Romans been denounced as the killers of the Christ.



Surely, no one, Indian or otherwise, should ignore the horrors committed by the murdering lunatics of a nation gone mad – against any peoples. And one would think that this response applies to the loathsome doings by the Brits as well as to those committed by the Nazis. Each went about building and trying to maintain an empire; this, required the Brits to annihilate many and subjugate all the peoples of numerous non-European nations – while the Nazis annihilated and subjugated a diversity of Europe's peoples.

[During the last half-century or so of the British occupation of India, some twelve to thirteen million Indian civilians were knowingly allowed, when not caused, to starve to death. And, it was during the latter years of WWII that two-to-three million of those deaths occurred – all, while the well-aware Brits deliberately prevented the delivery of food to them. This, by the way, was during the same period that the “good” German people stood by as some six million Jews were put to death.]

That the Judeo-Christian West cries out against the deliberate murdering of civilians by fanatical Moslems, is more than warranted – although, from a historical point of view, it smacks of unabashed hypocrisy. Every colonial power (including those presently considered liberal-leaning) was guilty of doing just that: the deliberate murdering of civilians as a means of bringing about the submission of an alien peoples to their will.

During WWII, in Europe, East Asia and the Subcontinent, the non-combatants mass-murdered, killed, or allowed to die, were, for the most part, the most vulnerable (the elderly, poorer and physically and mentally handicapped). In India today, one would be hard pressed to find mention of the millions of India’s poor who were knowingly allowed to starve to death by the Raj. Yet, those well-to-do Indians (regardless of their religion) whose families had fared ever so well under the Raj, routinely refer to the Holocaust – while ignoring the horrors inflicted on those millions of poor Indians who, while the Holocaust was being perpetrated by the Nazis, were knowingly caused to starve to death by the Brits. Perhaps it’s because the overwhelming majority of those starved-to-death Indians were both poor and non-Judeo-Christian – and those Indians and their progeny who were most capable of writing

about it proved to be the beneficiaries of the death-dealing by the Brits during their colonization of the Subcontinent.

[Having absorbed the concepts of life and death from the earliest of Indus river civilizations, Indians, but mainly Hindus, Buddhists, Jains and to some degree Sikhs, due to their having acquired an inherent belief in reincarnation, tend not to dwell on the past horrors committed against them. For them, one's essence is going to continue on into eternity, whether reincarnated here on earth or, due to self-willed moral actions, be freed from the everlasting ordeals of rebirth – in which case, one's atman will join with the omni-present, universal spirit: Brahma, in an eternal blissful union of nothingness.

[And, it's for this reason, that the loss of what is believed to be but an inconsequential, minute period of one's transitory existence here on earth, is not near as cataclysmic for India's believers in reincarnation – as the belief in an eternal death with no sequel, is for so many of even the least devout followers of Old Testament-based, religions. And it's this that makes Indians vulnerable to the greed motivated actions of those folks who believe that they have but one existence – and that's here on Earth: which for them, being deprived of their life force, ends it all. Their having no belief in a hereafter causes many to attempt to make the best deal for themselves in the here and now – which, all too often is done without any consideration for the good of others. All that notwithstanding, it should also be noted, that many of the world's most horrible deeds have been performed by folks with a firm belief in a hereafter.]

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There are many, and not necessarily anti-Semites, who feel that the constant stressing of the horrors of the Holocaust is being done to play on the resultant (albeit, well-earned)

guilt in the world-wide Euro-Christian community (as well as on that of non-Israeli Jews) as a means, especially in America, of benefiting Israel politically and financially. This, in the belief that folks would ignore Israel's chosen-people, contract-with-God, Bible-rationalized promised-land-grabbing being carried out by her people. However, it's more than just-conceivable that the continual references to the Holocaust has to do with the Orthodox Jew's Old Testament-based view of death. Although most followers of one or the other Monotheistic religions originating in the Near East tend to hold out the possibility of some sort of a spiritual, if not physical afterlife, Judaism, it appears, does not. (There are, however, many ethnic Jews and ethnic Christians, who, though ambivalent about the ritualistic aspects of their religions, are still fixed in their claims of having some sort of blood ties to the Old-Testament's Hebrews – despite their apparent lack of Semitic genetic inputs.)

Although Atheists are not known to have a belief in a hereafter; many, if not most are still somewhat moral and considerate of the needs and independence of others. Nevertheless, there were those Atheist advocates of Communism and Nazism (German socialism) who resorted to some of the most heinous acts in order to achieve a self-serving end. Communists tried to make life better for all earth-bound people by spreading the wealth evenly amongst all folks – and went about killing off the bourgeoisie, wealthy or not, as a means of accomplishing it. Nazi socialists attempted to make the existence of Germans, those members of a master-race, better – at the expense of everybody else – and caused the deaths of tens of millions through attempts at conquest – while annihilating millions of others whom they considered not fit to live.

Meanwhile, the non-believing-in-a-hereafter, designated representatives of Judeo-Christian colonialism, having used

the Old Testament's authorization by God for His chosen people (and all Judeo-Christians believed they were counted amongst them) to steal their promised land from a less-deserving peoples, went about massacring any and all non-European folks that prevented them from stealing their land and wealth – this, as a means for them to enhance their one-time-around lives, and occasionally that of their own people. All of which accounts for the current stress on materialism, the essence of the New World Order: whose advocates are composed of an amalgamation of all those claiming to be acting in accordance with the will of their One-and-Only-Judeo-Christian-Monotheistic God.

The claims that they're doing their God's work, by the Judeo-Christian promoters of the New World Order – as they go about attempting, globally, to implement it in nations willing or not to accept it, makes sense. The New World Order is strictly a sugar-coated version of the same-old, greed-driven, steal-it-while-you-can colonialism. And, they, much like the rapacious colonizers of old, had absolutely no feeling for their fellow man, or a belief in the possibility of a comeuppance for their actions during a hereafter, spiritual or otherwise. They too have a contract which requires that they pay homage to Him, and no other god, all of which allows for their stealing the lands and wealth of others. It's their God's will!

[The plaintive song "Is that all there is?" was popular back in the 1960's. During that fateful decade the nation witnessed: the assassination of Kennedy; racial riots; desegregation-and poverty-related murders; the Vietnam fiasco; drug abuse; a sexual revolution; James Bond; the Beatles; the 1967 War and Vatican II – all of which combined to cause thinking people to demand their right to determine their own future. Few, after exercising that right were strong enough to go on alone. Some turned to

religions guaranteeing a hereafter, with some seeking it in Indian ashrams. Others too weak to stand alone and without a hereafter to look forward to, sought out a shrink.

[By the early 2000's, with principles gone, as the rich got richer and the poor poorer, a majority of fearful middling Americans aligned themselves with their fellow religionists and ethnic groupings. And then, with a feigned patriotism and claimed support of their God – to satisfy their greed, they supported America in a racist- and oil-based war.]

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Sculptor's Studio -- West SoHo – 1980's (Oil)

The Atheist's Lament

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No One to blame,
Nor thank for fame,
For we have no God:
He, She, It or They,
Who bade us do those beastly things,
To gain that honor for our name.

When no God's around,
For belief profound,
To bless our deeds so awful,
Done to give us lasting glory,
Or gain a leg-up on some others,
Then evil doings by Atheistic beings,
Or by a medley of God's' adherents,
All remain – for non-believers,
Shameful acts forever.

For when there's no God for folks to claim:
*"It was but the bidding of The All-Knowing: He, She, They or It,
That I've accomplished;
It was but the will of my God Almighty;
It was an obligation of my faith:
To obey my Lord: the Supreme One –
Or glorified Manifold-Presence,
And do those wretched deeds,
Now deemed evil –
Even by God-fearing ones."*

"Amen."

*

[There are no Atheist chaplains in the armed forces. Atheists would make awful chaplains – they have no God to bless the men as they commit their carnage – or give them courage to die for oil to fuel the Limos of the wealthy and the S.U.V.'s of Texas.]

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The Gathering On The Grass – (Continued)

Since the effects of the stress of the Holocaust went far beyond the West, one shouldn't be surprised that by the turn of the millennium, a play deploring the effects of the Holocaust on the West's Jewish population was presented to a sell-out crowd at Mumbai's luxuriously-modern Tata Theater. The crowd was made up, primarily, of the city's wealthiest and most-well-to-do, upper-middle-class, fairer-skinned Indians. And, that crowd, which had so willingly taken on the West's guilt for its bigotry-based attitude towards Europe's Jews (which had laid the groundwork for the Holocaust), was much moved by the performance. That horrors committed by the Germans were and should be condemned by folks worldwide, is not the question. But, the fact that India's own poor had suffered as much due to the misdeeds of the colonial-era Brits, in numbers that far exceeded those of Europe's poorer and less prominent Jews who had been so inhumanely annihilated by the Nazis, did not seem to phase this well-heeled Indian audience. With few exceptions, India's Hindu and Moslem poor are pretty-much ignored by the sort of folks who frequent most performances at the National Center for the Performing Arts.

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It seems that it's almost always the poorest amongst any peoples, whether as soldiers or civilians, who suffer most due to the doings of tyrannical governments. In India, the wealthier and more prominent citizens were, for the most part, able to avoid the worst doings of the kill-to-conquer-for-wealth British government. And, although a majority of the wealthiest Jews, most of whom were able to flee Nazi-occupied Europe prior to the onset of the Holocaust, were, if they came to America, often reviled by the nation's middle and lower-middle-class Jews – those Jewish

refugees involved in academia, cinema, the arts and such, were welcomed with pride by all Americans. No doubt, in the aftermath of WWII, it was the guilt (experienced by the survivors of all major death-dealing occurrences) of the progeny of Nazi-era-Europe's wealthy, Jewish refugees that caused them to blindly support politically and financially every action of the state of Israel. But, for the most part, prior to WWII, few of the West's Jews, wealthy or not, showed any interest in supporting Zionism.

However, no comparable evidence of guilt seems to be shown by those modern-day Indians whose well-to-do ancestors had escaped the horrors inflicted on India's poorer and less prominent citizenry during the reign of the Raj. Perhaps some do feel a degree of guilt, but if they do, there's mighty little evidence that any major attempt is now being made to ease their consciences by spreading their wealth – as the West's guilt-bearing, wealthy Jews do amongst Israel's Jewish population. There appears to be no broad-based, significant offer by India's upper income and wealthy to help the ancestors of those less fortunate of their countrymen: those who had survived the British-colonialism-caused holocaust that had been carried out against the indigenous people of the Subcontinent.

What may help to account for that ignoring of the plight of India's own needy, is that many publications in India, despite the requirement that they be Indian-owned and operated, routinely carry agenda-driven articles that originated in American and other Western newspapers. It would be bad enough should this be due to Indian publishers' being offered the articles on the cheap or that they're paid, directly or indirectly, for carrying them. But it's quite possible that some of India's publishers have, themselves, adopted the West's negative view of India, vis-à-vis that of a positive one of the West. Nevertheless, no matter what the reason, the resultant everyday, pro-West,

propaganda-like influence from the press, does add to the comparatively negative view of India that the country's youths get from their being constantly exposed to the literature, movies and TV produced and disseminated by the many developed, English-speaking nations.

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[The desire by so many better-off Indians to Westernize (especially those in a cosmopolitan city like Mumbai), had a goodly number of them taking on the same sort of guilt that's been rightfully laid on Europeans for their having created the bigotry-based atmosphere that allowed for the enactment of the horrors of the Holocaust. Realizing this, some Israelis and pro-Israeli American Jews appear to be intent on turning this into a pro-anything-Israel-does attitude by Indians. So, despite some sixty years, or so, having elapsed since the Holocaust, pro-Israeli elements continue to harp on it – even in India. The logical reason for this could very well be that India is fast becoming a major, economic world power (it has one of the world's largest economies), and with a Moslem population of well over a hundred million, India could be a problem for Israel, as well as for America: due to our unflinching support of Israel. Since the current members of the American consulate in Mumbai appear to be in close contact with certain pro-Israel Jews, and any manifestation of a pro-Israel sentiment is tantamount to an anti-Moslem one, it would appear that the stress on the Holocaust has the support of America's pro-Israel, anti-Islam, neo-cons in Dubya's administration.]

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For whatever her reason, Evelyn Levi, an American woman of a certain age, tried to ape and then apply an aspect of a once-in, New York art event, to South Mumbai's near-

nonexistent gallery-going scene. Having convinced a few galleries that her walking tour, if they participated (perhaps by her inferring that she could bring rich tourists into their galleries), would generate sales for them, had some maintaining a one-day open house and offering simple refreshments to all comers. However, since few if any sales were made, galleries tended to decline the honor of being included in her future tours.

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Like so many ambitious, educated Indians, the thirty-year-old wannabe actor, Ravi Kumar, wanted to leave India. Although India, much like any other nation produces its fair share of calculating, sleazy, money-grubbing characters, the overwhelming majority of Indians – no matter their caste or religion, are, much like Ravi Kumar, open and honest – to the point of their appearing naive. And, it's that trusting nature that has middle-class Indians believing in the absolute accuracy of Hollywood's and Cable TV's portrayal of America as a pristine and idyllic, land of truly-equal opportunity along with a John Wayne-type integrity for all her people.

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The American New Yorker, Evelyn Levi, driven by a belief in the business acumen of her ancestors (which is often accepted as fact by a diversity of peoples worldwide), had a variety of deals in the works – many of which were close to the fringes of legality. She had let it be known that an Indian was needed who would be a suitable front for an “adult” magazine that she was planning to publish in Mumbai. And it was then, that a mutual friend arranged for a meeting between Evelyn Levi and Ravi Kumar, who, despite Mumbai's burgeoning film industry, rarely found employment – and when he did, it had him playing minor roles.

This Evelyn Levi, a middle-class, over-the-hill, neurotic New Yorker with but a middling intellect and knowledge of either Indian or Western art, considered Indians such an uncultured lot that she, like the Egyptian Moses, could lead them to the promised land of culture (which in her mind, seemed to include an appreciation of soft-porn). Although, this may very-well have been a shrink-inspired objective intended to help give a purpose to the life of this well-to-do, childless, mentally-unstable, unemployable-in-the-States, trying-to-appear-young, elderly woman – or was a self-determined attempt by the lady herself to confirm her ability to be an entrepreneur, didn't alter the fact that her decision was based on the still-prevalent conceit held by so many ignorant and bigoted Judeo-Christian peoples (those of European ancestry residing in the West) – which is that the fairer one's skin, the superior one's intellect and business acumen. This requires their taking on the *White-Man's Burden* – which appears to be none other than the obligation to acquire, any way they can, the wealth held by those “inferior” peoples.

The lady showed an ignorance-based conceit that could only be compared to the condescending attitude displayed towards India's rulers and merchants by the wanting-to-barter, earliest of European arrivals. They had assumed Indians were so unknowing, that they would accept trinkets and gewgaws in exchange for their spices, perfumery, cloth and such. One hopes that when the lady (who's on very good terms with the folks at the American Consulate in Mumbai) realizes that her lowly concept of Indian sophistication (often masked by an attitude of politeness towards strangers – and taken for naiveté) is misplaced, that she doesn't add one more bigot to the list of Neocon Americans. That list is composed of folks who once claimed to be liberal – but who now, in goosestep, adhere to the greed-cum-racist-oriented policies of the West's

multinational corporations that are promoting a New World Order: that avatar of old-fashioned rapacious colonialism.

[However, with a fast-growing, restless, eager-to-be rich, middle-class (which, in 2004 numbered more than two hundred millions), it won't be long before Indians willingly consent to accept the indignities that will most assuredly be imposed on them as they too embrace the concept of a New World Order (currently being put forth by a conglomeration of reactionary, claiming-to-have-been-liberal Neocons; neo-fascist-racists; neo-colonizing Judeo-Christians and, greedy, ultra-conservative-of-their-wealth Republicans). In the unlikely event that India refuses to succumb to the demands of the advocates of the New World Order, the result could very-well be every bit as disastrous for Indians as when the West's earlier insulting offers of trade were rejected – at which time Europe's traders, with their government's military support, proceeded to steal the valuable stuff from them – without even giving them so much as glass beads in return.]

Representatives of the American Embassy, in Mumbai, were in attendance at the American woman's, Evelyn Levi's, revised gallery-hopping tours. The reading of original poetry was added to the viewing of the artwork on display at the various, inconsequential galleries on the route. And, prizes were awarded to the authors of the poetry based on the votes of those folks attending all the participating galleries. The poems varied from so-so to so-bad – with many prizes given out (small cartons of Indian-made, Western-type cigarettes, thought to be tax-free donations by the American Consulate in conjunction with the cigarette manufacturer).

Although the tour was to be based on the reading of original poetry and art – a letter written by James Joyce was read aloud by an emoting Indian with an actor's stilted, upper-

class, British accent. Whether as a means of increasing interest in her intended publication of a porno magazine, or to add interest in the tours, the letter selected, was one in which Joyce went into explicit detail about his sexual doings with his wife. The reaction of the Indian audience was mainly one of embarrassment (the obvious intent of the actor) – with a few showing signs of (feigned?) intellectual participation.

In addition, at one of the last galleries, Evelyn Levi (possibly with the support of the American Consulate, which at the time was subordinated to the demands of the Bush, Neocon administration) had arranged to have a long passage about the horrors of the Holocaust read by an Israeli to an obviously-bored but always-polite, Indian audience. That this occurred shortly after the 2003 American invasion of Iraq had to be more than a mere coincidence.

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Back at the Poetry Circle, another Indian Catholic, a male poet who appeared to be in his thirties, headed up an evening's poetry reading by selecting the works of four poets, claiming that all four of the poets selected, just happened, by coincidence, to be Jewish. And, despite that being highly unlikely, had he not made a point of their being Jewish, his selection would have passed unquestioned.

The reasons for the Catholic gentleman's selection of four little-known Jewish poets to laud and expound upon, resembled those of a pro-everything-Jewish attitude evinced by many Euro-ethnic Christians: those guilt-ridden, more-liberal progeny of ancestors who were involved in that virulent form of anti-Semitism which led to the horrors of the Holocaust. Meanwhile, some Westernized Indians

(whether or not Christian) though far from becoming skinheaded neo-Nazis, lean towards being anti-Semite-lites.

But, one might ask: Why should an Indian Christian be so affected? After all, the ancestors of the proselytized Indians, had suffered as much as a result of the West's Bible-based nonsense regarding race, at the hands of superiorly-armed, empire-maintaining Brits and other European colonizers, as had Europe's Jews at the hands of the trying-to-build-an-empire Germans.

Just why they were so willing to take on the guilt of their fellow Christians residing in the West, can be traced, in part, to their ancestor's conversions. The missionary culture is based on the conceit that as Christians, they have an obligation to proselytize the heathen. As a result of their having converted India's poorest (by bribery, threat of force or for their perceived potential gain of one sort or another), the proselytes are required to adopt the West's Euro-centric, Judeo-Christian values: cultural, political, economic, history-based, and of course religious – while being expected to deny, if not denigrate the comparative inputs to their own Indian cultural heritage. With each new generation, the progeny of India's missionary-taught Christians appear to be more and more adamant in denying their Indian cultural roots – as they go about denigrating them.

In addition, being Christian for many Indians no longer suffices – it's to live the life of a well-to-do, Euro-Caucasian Christian that's their goal. And, although it's also the goal of many non-Christian Indians, it's what causes so many of India's Christians to take on that guilt which is so deservedly being borne by Christian Europeans – for their having taken part in, or at the very least, having brought about the atmosphere that allowed for the Holocaust.

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Though Mohammedanism also stressed the proselytizing of the infidel, with Moslems looking to Mecca, much as Catholics look to Rome and Anglican-Protestants look to London for the seat of their religion, looking west didn't affect India's Moslems to the same degree as it did India's colonialism-era Indian converts to Christianity. As a result, India's Moslems still have much more in common, culturally, with India's Hindu majority and the progeny of the small populations of pre-colonialism-era Christians, Parsis and Jews, than do the Subcontinent's missionary-era, converted Christians. This is due to their (Indian Moslems) continuing acceptance (though somewhat reluctantly – but with far less disinclination to do so than their recently-Christianized counterparts) of their historical and cultural roots – which, like those of all Indians (probably including most Zoroastrians) go back at least as far as that of the pre-historic ancient Sumerian and Indus River, Harappan civilizations. (*And, both those civilizations had their beginnings at least four thousand years before the earliest conversions of Indians to Islam.*)

[Jinnah had supported a united India – until he realized just how powerful the influence of India's ancient, Hindu culture was, and how it could overwhelm that of Mohammedanism. Believing this would place India's Moslem population in a subordinate role, he arranged, with an ever-willing-to-oblige England, to support the breakup of India in order to establish the Moslem state of Pakistan. The resultant internecine warfare was to cause the death of hundreds of thousands of both Hindus and Moslems. Contrary to Jinnah's fears, Moslems in India have the same legal rights as Hindus – which are considerable. And, although, during the past few decades, religious carnage amongst India's most impoverished citizens occurs from

time to time, in Pakistan the death toll due to Moslems of one sect murdering Moslems of another, is far more persistent than the strife between Hindus and Moslems in India: a country with a population eight-times that of Pakistan.]

The evolved wisdom emanating from that earliest of India's known root cultures (that of Harappa – with its many-millennia-long influences on all Indians), was even absorbed into the psyche of India's most prominent, Moslem Mogul Emperor, Akbar. All of which allowed Moslems (no matter how devoted) to maintain much of their Indian-ness. Missionary Christianity, on the other hand, by dangling the materialistic goodies of the West, has (for the more-recently proselytized) successfully replaced India's truly ancient and verifiable history with a made-up one emanating from the Old Testament: a genetic history, said to have been written down in the third century BC and derived from every ancient culture – with parts, if not invented, then very-much embellished, by seventy Greek Rabbis (a group of dedicated believers in *my-God-is-the-only-God*). This, if true, was accomplished nearly three thousand years after India's heritage is now begrudgingly-in-the-West acknowledged to have begun.

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It's been common practice for a claiming-to-be-missionary-taught, English-speaking Indian with a crucifix dangling on a chain around his neck (who, whether or not he's really a Christian, acts as if his acceptance of Western culture makes him superior to his own fellow Indians) to approach Westerners for the purpose of conning them. His manner is intended to indicate that since both are followers of one or the other Judeo-Christian religions, they are as one – and therefore superior to the members of India's "heathen" Moslem and Hindu religions: a concept fostered in many

missionary schools and accepted worldwide amongst many my-God-is-the-only-god religionists.

For the most part, members of India's non-Hindu and non-Moslem, religious and ethnic minorities are hardly the sufferers of economic hardship that one associates with America's non-Euro-Judeo-Christian minorities. In India, those living in poverty are more-or-less equally (percentage-wise) divided amongst Hindus and Moslems: who, together, account for over ninety percent of the nation's population. But this doesn't hold true for India's colonial-era proselytized Catholics and Protestants, as well as Parsis, many of whom continue to benefit from their ancestors having catered to Europe's colonizing occupiers of the Subcontinent – and as a consequence a majority of them, on average, tend to be amongst India's more prosperous citizens.

[Sikhs appear to be better off economically than Hindus and Moslems, but poverty still exists amongst them. And, virtually all of the handful of South India's Jews, after finally convincing Israel's Germano-Slavic religious authorities that they really were Jews – despite their dark complexions and Indian-like features, have been allowed to migrate to Israel (where, one is told, they're not totally accepted.)]

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Getting back to the poetry readings, on the face of it, as far as India's one billion citizens are concerned, the attitudes of the two participating Catholic individuals had no effect. But the lady's rationalized missionary-bred conceit, along with the gentleman's atoning for the sins committed by his Euro-Christian co-religionists – which had these two Indians championing every aspect of the West's culture and point of view – were shared by many of the other better-off

descendants of colonialism-era Indians. And, this held true, not only for the progeny of those millions who had been enticed or forced by the Portuguese to convert to Roman Catholicism, but, also for the descendants of India's millions of missionary-converted, rice-Christian Protestants (the bribe, of course, need not have been rice). In addition, what makes it all the more damaging to the Indian ethos, and to some degree (but that's debatable) to India's economy, is that this denigration of all things Indian and veneration for everything Western, has spread well beyond India's missionary-Christian populations, and has caused many millions of India's middle- and upper-middle-class Hindu and Moslem youths to strive for the life of an NRI.

Nevertheless, all things considered, despite the goodly number of educated, and not-so-educated Indians (of every religion) in the process of acquiring Western tastes, with many of them only too anxious to emigrate to those countries dominated by Europeans – in general, the overwhelming majority of Indians, with many admittedly influenced by the remarkable modern-day accomplishments of the West, are still keenly aware of the positive aspects of their ancient Indian ancestral roots.

[A serendipitous result for India, due to her educated middle-class's having absorbed so much of Western culture, is the nation's ability to benefit economically from the outsourcing of service jobs to India by English-speaking nations.]



Back some hundred years or so, the vast majority of migrants to what are now the economically-advanced, English-speaking nations (the former British colonies – which includes America) were semi- and unskilled European laborers. Being outsiders, who, for the most part, arrived destitute, they suffered the same hardships and

indignities that had been experienced by each preceding set of arrivals (though the humiliation and privation they suffered may very well have been no worse than that which they were forced to endure in the land they left). Undeterred, each fresh set of immigrants made new and usually better lives for themselves. This worked to the economic and political advantage of their old homelands: it relieved them of the need to deal with millions of their impoverished citizens. Meanwhile, in those days of labor-intensive industry, it gave their new homeland an ample supply of eager-to-work, cheap labor.

As the twentieth century drew to a close, there was more than a sufficient supply of unskilled and semi-skilled manual labor (either homegrown or legal-and-illegal, permanent and temporary, migrant workers) to fill the needs of the menial service and low-tech manufacturing industries in America – as well as in those other nations that were in the process of becoming (or were) developed.

The past practice of hiring non-Euro-Caucasian minorities and migrants to fill low-paying and demeaning jobs had little or no overall effect on the established, income-based, social pecking order. However, the hiring of highly-educated, homegrown and foreign-born, non-Euro-Caucasians for wages far above those earned by the average, native-born, Euro-Caucasian American was a different story. Not only did this new breed of highly-paid professionals disrupt the accepted pecking order, but those who were info-techies were indirectly, if not directly involved in the making and consequential adopting of computer-driven, labor-saving devices. The resultant increase in worker productivity made for substantial increases in corporate profits – which resulted in an increase of the wealth of the few, as the formerly well-paid blue- and white-color workers were losing their jobs. And once their unemployment insurance ran out, many had no

choice but to take the low-paying jobs in the service industry. This, in turn, caused many to join the ranks of the working poor.

If those laid-off, blue- and white-collar workers came only from recent immigrant groups or were numbered amongst the still-considered, disadvantaged minorities, it wouldn't have disrupted the accepted social pecking order. However, that was not the case; the majority of those who lost their jobs were at least first- and second-generation Euro-Caucasian Americans. And, that did affect it: virtually all of those folks had been made to believe that they, as law-abiding, willing-to-work Americans, were socially and economically secure. So, when their jobs were lost (and lacking the long-term government support that workers in Europe can depend on), they were left with little choice but to accept lower-paying jobs. Since millions of jobs previously filled by well-paid, skilled and semi-skilled labor had been made superfluous, the income-based, social pecking order had to be adjusted.

The new, rising upper-middle-class (which included a majority of highly-educated, homegrown minorities, recent immigrants and skilled migrant workers) were receiving wages well above those earned by even the still-employed, well-paid, average, middle-class blue- and white-collar worker. This disrupted the country's, until-then-accepted, income- and ethnicity-based social order. And, for those forced to take lower-paying jobs, the consequence of their loss of both societal and economic status, was even more humbling.

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There's little overt objection to a barely perceptible, comparative lowering of labor's social and economic status in those countries with an overwhelmingly-large, mono-

ethnic population with generally-high, blue-collar incomes and broad-based economic safety nets – which were usually attained by strong unions intent on maintaining a certain level of their members’ social status and economic condition. However, when a nation, such as America, with her diverse ethnic population, has a multitude of alienated, un- and under-employed low income and poor, and when its minimum wage, health coverage and unemployment compensation is inadequate (and often non-existent) then both an open-door immigration policy and that of free trade, become contentious. And it becomes readily-understandable that a broad-based resentment manifests itself towards all those thought responsible for it – sometimes it’s their fellow Americans – but usually, it’s the unwitting foreigners.

From 1980 on, a reactionary Republican Party fought against the establishment of a minimum wage that could even approach a minimum living-wage. Meanwhile, the long-sitting chairman of the Federal Reserve: a man with no idea of what it is to live on a minimum wage, condemns the very idea of one.

America’s greed-motivated neo-conservative Republicans and fellow travelers appear determined to establish a New World Order (a.k.a.: neo-colonialism). During England’s colonialism-empire period, her workers had the worst effects of their greed-caused poverty mitigated by appealing to a racist sentiment: no matter how lowly an Englishman was, he was superior to the folks in all other nations – and especially in those of the non-white colonies.

America’s money-money-money-based wannabe-aristocrats seem determined to return America to her Hooverville days. America’s greediest appear determined to reinstate the economic disparity between the have-a-lots and the have-not-very-much-or-nothings – that was once rationalized by

those advocates of the dismal science: David Ricardo and Adam Smith – as being an acceptable consequence of free enterprise. Apparently, going back seventy-plus years to the pre-New Deal era of America isn't sufficient to appease those fearful-of-losing-their yachts, tax loopholes, estates and country-club memberships. In addition, those folks seem intent on trivializing the rights of the common man – by turning America's Senate of millionaires into a facsimile of the Victorian-era Brits' House of Lords. By aping the doings of England's Dickensian era, America's greediest will soon be able to provide Americans with an abundant supply of their very-own living facsimiles of Oliver Twist and Tiny Tim.

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The right to migrate to any country that accepts them, should certainly be that of any citizen of any country worldwide. Although, prior to WWI, Europe's ambitious poor and least educated made up the mass of voluntary migrations to an open-door-policy America, nowadays (albeit, with exceptions) only the well-educated are legally permitted to do so. This is where the unfairness to India's indigenous population comes in. Opportunities to obtain an education in India, especially one that is marketable in fully-developed countries, are limited. Moreover, the costs of those educations are subsidized primarily by India's indigenous taxpayers – this, directly by the government, and indirectly by the professors and staffs of Indian universities: due to the low pay they receive. The resultant educations are acquired for a pittance (especially when one compares the cost of a college education in India with that in countries to which the most qualified youths are allowed, when not encouraged to migrate). So, educated Indians really do have an obligation to their motherland – especially those who've emigrated. And, at the very least, that obligation requires that educated-in-India Indians, or those

whose educations abroad were financed by resident Indians, help to insure that India maintains her independence and that her government is run honestly and democratically for the benefit of all her people – rather than ignoring or running away from India and her problems.

[This is not to say that there are no NRIs who send money home to help their relatives (although, it's often to help them migrate), nor that there are no idealistically-motivated resident and non-resident Indians who altruistically fund charitable Indian organizations.]

The multitude of NRIs who've settled in Westernized nations are known to dwell on their far-from accurate memories of a never-was Indian heritage (not an uncommon practice engaged in by expatriates and immigrants, worldwide – which is to exaggerate the importance of their ancestral roots in an attempt to compensate for their less-than-complete acceptance by the nationals in their new-found habitats). In addition, while engaging there in work that they wouldn't be caught dead doing when in geographic India, many of the progeny of the Subcontinent's recent out-flowing tend to stress a pride in their heritage: one that they and their parents seldom, if ever displayed when in their ancestral home – while at the same time displaying an air of superiority towards their still India-based compatriots. Conversely, there are those NRIs who deprecate their homeland as a means of rationalizing their having left it.

[Meanwhile, innumerable NRIs end up spending much of their time and a sizable part of their income building temples and mosques to mollify their guilt for having turned their backs on their homeland – with its ancient, pre-Harappan-based history and culture.]

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Zubin Mehta has compared the Parsis' experience in India with that of Jews in the West. This might very well have been an effort on his part to win the hearts and minds of the Israelis – whose national orchestra he conducts. However, if the writer's conversation with a few non-musician Israelis is any indication of his accomplishing that end, he failed: only indications of a negative nature were observed – which appeared to have been based solely on his not being a Jew, and had nothing, whatsoever, to do with his musicianship.

Of course, Jews and Parsis do have certain aspects of their historic pasts in common. India's Parsis, due to their relatively rigid marriage requirements: both parties (at least in theory) must be Parsi-born, were more successful than Jews in maintaining at least some degree of a claimed genetic purity. But keep in mind, that during the course of Zoroastrian centuries-long dominance, it had been the official religion (until the Muslim invasion) of the Sassanian Empire – which at times stretched from Afghanistan on westward to Iran, Mesopotamia, Syria and Armenia. And these were lands that, over earlier millennia, had been invaded and ruled by Sumerian, Mongolian, Semitic, Indo-European and who knows what other peoples. Jews, on the other hand, trace their lineage through the mother, and a Jewish man can easily arrange for the conversion to Judaism of any woman he wishes to legally bed with. The obvious result being, to anyone who opens his eyes, that during the millennia of migratory travels, the benefits of a diverse gene pool for those claiming to be Jews was greatly increased. However, the resultant magnificent gene pool of those claiming Biblical origins often resulted in its having a complete absence of any evidence of Semitic, let alone ancient Hebrew ancestry.

[As to the purity, gene-wise, of any people, including all those calling themselves: Blacks, Whites, Browns, Yellows,

Tans (along with all their sub-groups) – one should bear in mind that the chances (the last time the writer checked) of any one gene passing down to the ninth generation is one in four-hundred million. It boggles the mind to consider just what the chances of any one gene passing down to the thirtieth – let alone to the fiftieth generation would be. Nevertheless, racism persists -- and not always perpetrated by the usual suspects. It's used both to denigrate others, as well as a means of self-promotion. And, at various times in their history, the followers of one or the other Monotheistic, my-God-is-the-only-god religions (for economic, political and even for theological reasons), by using the Bible's ignorance-based determinations of race, went about murdering any folks who were not considered one of theirs. It wasn't until fifty years after Columbus's discovery of America that the Catholic Church accepted the American Indian as a fellow human being.]

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Within a century or so after their defeat of the Sassanian Empire (c.640), Moslems began the persecution of unwilling-to-convert Zoroastrians (who themselves, a few centuries earlier, had persecuted the Manichaeans – whose religion had influenced Christian dogma every bit as much as Zoroastrianism and Buddhism). Refusing to submit to the demands of Islam, Zoroastrians, as Parsis (Persians) emigrated to India – where they met with no persecution. In the case of Jews, almost two thousand years before the Holocaust, Greco-Semitic followers of Judaism, those who were forced to flee from their homeland (in the aftermath of Titus's and then Severus's merciless assault to put down their resistance to pre-Christian Roman rule), spread throughout the then-known world – some finding refuge as far away as India and China.

[All conquest-bound nations can only maintain their control over their ill-gotten gains through the ruthless suppression of every attempt by the subjugated peoples to rule themselves. And Rome, like Britain and every colonial power, resorted to the most heinous crimes in order to retain their control over the lives of conquered peoples – and (when bribery doesn't suffice) to control a majority of their own far-from-rich citizenry. During the first years of this third millennium of the current era, certain ignorant-of-history leaders of America and Britain advocated the establishment of an obviously-self-serving “New World Order” – which is based on an Anglo-American, Euro-centric, Judeo-Christian, economic and societal concept of what's right and what's wrong.]

[Since the “New World Order” is just a jazzed-up term for old-fashioned, greed-motivated, despotic colonialism – all but America's and England's client nations oppose the very concept of it. And should those in opposition to it be successful in deterring America (and tag-along England) from realizing their goal, they will have done the American people a great service – they would have prevented America from becoming just another murdering, yet doomed-to-fail empire. One hopes, for the sake of the people living in the rest of the world, along with all Americans, that the will of more knowledgeable, if not necessarily more-moral heads of state, will be successful in persuading America's leaders to abort their ill-conceived attempts to re-colonize the militarily-weaker nations of the world.]

In the aftermath of Rome's violent suppression of their attempts at self-rule, many Jews (according to the historian, Will Durant, seven million Jews resided throughout the Roman Empire) were to find sanctuary in the Hindu, Buddhist, pre-Christian and pre-Moslem areas of Asia, North Africa and Eastern and Central Europe – and later, in

those areas where Moslems became dominant (and where there never was a concerted persecution of Jews or Christians for their religious beliefs). Meanwhile, some thousand-plus years ago, Parsis began their escape from religious persecution at the hands of Islamic fanatics by migrating to Hindu India – where they were (as were the then and future small number of Jews) free to maintain and exercise the exclusionary practices involved in their own religion.

Moslems were not known to be in conflict with Jews – until, that is, the Zionist-inspired attempts to establish a Jewish homeland by buying-out, and then physically uprooting the Palestinian Moslems. Even after that, merchants in Moslem-controlled cities, whether followers of Islam, Christianity or Judaism, were still only required to abide by Moslem-based law – much as one must abide by Judeo-Christian-based law in Western nations; modern-day, Hindu-based law (much of which has English roots) in India and a neo-communism-based law in China. Moreover, only Christians and Jews, as folks of the Book (with the exception that, as non-Moslems, they were often required to pay a tax), were routinely treated in Islamic nations, much the same as were Moslems.



The Zionist movement was triggered by Bismarck's attempts to unify Germany (accomplished in 1871), which eventually isolated her Jewish citizenry: whose ancestors had lived there for as long as Parsis dwelt in India. The Zionist movement gained momentum with the realization that, with WW1's destruction of the Ottoman Empire, Palestine would be up for grabs. Ergo, Rothschild's conditional war-time loan to Balfour's England. Then, the aftereffect of the atrocities committed by Nazi-Germany was to be the final input to the understandable drive by

Europe's Jews to establish a Jewish state. And, notwithstanding the fact that Palestine's majority peoples, for well over a millennia, had been Islamic Arabs, the West's deservedly-guilt-ridden Christians gave tacit, when not outspoken support for the founding there of the Jewish state of Israel.

Bismarck's unification of a Christian Germany effectively made German Jews a more separate, if not isolated people. Then, with the Nazi mass-murdering of Jews based on a nonsensical interpretation of Mendel's simplistic genetic theory, which was juxtaposed by the publicizing of the rare Tay-Sachs disease (the result of inbreeding by a small segment of Eastern Europeans, mainly Jews), a modern-day belief that Jews belonged to an identifiable people – regardless of any individual's religious, ethnic, national or even racial identity, became accepted worldwide. Besides losers' (most notably from amongst Jews, Christians and Moslems) using this absurd conclusion for their own little-minded reasons, Israelis (whether or not liberals) outwardly accepted this preposterous theory of a Jewish ancestral identity, along with a continuous stress on the Holocaust, as a means of garnering the economic, moral and political support of a majority of America's ethnic Jews — as well as that of continually-made-guilt-ridden Christians worldwide.

That the Nazis, despite the obvious multifaceted gene-pool of those included in their own touted "Aryan Nation", claimed that they were a purebred people and that Germany's and the rest of Europe's Jews were mongrels — may very well have caused Jews, worldwide, to conjure up and stress a racial identity for themselves.

The term anti-Semitism was created in the latter part of the 1800's by a German Jew – no doubt to concoct a nonsensical genetic purity for Jews to counter the

preposterous claims by Germany's Christians that they had a pure Teutonic ancestry. And, if not for the fact that both those inane assertions had, and continue to have fatal consequences, they could easily be laughed away.

[It's their stress on a racial connection with the Bible's Hebrews that had so many American Jews claiming anti-Semitism when a movie was made of the crucifixion of Christ – which cast Biblical Hebrew religious leaders as its advocates. If not for the absurd claims by modern-day, Germano-Slavic Jews that they are as one, genetically, with those fifty-to-one-hundred-generations-back, Hebrew, religious zealots, present day ethnic Jews would have no more cause to feel demeaned by the movie, than would today's individuals with Italian or Greek ancestry. After all, the Gospels inferred that it was the Greek-speaking Romans who were doing the actual torture and killing of Jesus.]

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Though Zubin Mehta's having compared the Parsis' experience in India with that of Jews in the West, has some truth to it, there's one really major difference – and that's that somewhat nebulous term: anti-Semitism. Some Indians may harbor a slight feeling of ill will towards Parsis, due to their relative prosperity, but in no way (at least to date) does this compare to the knee-jerk animosity towards Jews exhibited by a diversity of folks, worldwide – and that even includes some Parsis. Moreover, Indians are far more likely to take pride in the doings of India's Zoroastrians, whether Iranis or Parsis, than are Americans of America's Jews.

Unless those folks with Jewish ancestry stop claiming to be “the” *Chosen of God* – the very same God that so many other folks believe in – whether honored as a Supreme Being, a Spiritual Oneness or whatever, one wonders if

there ever can be an end to even the least obsessive forms of anti-Semitism.

The belief, that as Jews they are *Chosen of God*, matches the conceit held by Germans (also a genetically disparate peoples) under Hitler, that they belonged to a *Master Race* – which gave them the courage to attempt (and nearly succeed) to conquer the world. What this does, is cause all-too-many aggressive Jews (regardless of any innate ability) to have the motivation, if not the compulsion, to excel – academically and monetarily. However, just as those motivated by their belief in belonging to a *Master Race* resorted to all means at their disposal to test that assumption, so too do all too many of those folks claiming to be amongst the *Chosen of God*, persist in testing their status before their God.

That neither of those traits are attributable solely to those individuals' claiming to be Chosen People or members of a Master Race, is a given. It's just that people have been made aware of the results of those folk's beliefs far more than when they're manifested by individuals belonging to other less-universally-vilified but comparable populations.

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Why were those little countries like England and Holland so much richer than so many of those nations which were much larger and that had far greater natural resources? That was the question posed to the writer by some bright Indian youths.

The prohibition against the assessing of interest by Moslems, and until more recent times, by the Catholic Church – tended to prevent both Islamic and Catholic colonizers from lending out the ill-gotten monetary gains from their colonies at usurious interest rates. Had they done

so, it would have allowed their wrenched-from-their-colonies wealth to multiply – much as it did for the colonizing Judeo-Christian Dutch and Brits: who were able, during and after their occupation of militarily-weaker nations, to utilize those amassed fortunes that were to be the source of Judeo-Christian Europe’s venture capital. In this way, the West was able to maintain and continually increase its brutally-obtained inordinate wealth. The result of all this, is that the West’s former colonizing nations (and their select offshoots), continue to attempt to dominate (often successfully) the economies of the world’s redeveloping, developing and under-developed nations.

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By the year two thousand, the major redeveloping nations: most notably China and India, were, after benefiting from a heavy dose of socialism, in the process of trying (but with little success) to bypass the intermediate stages that the West endured during its industrial revolution: a time when slave-waged laborers, the world over – including the West’s very own people – were being used to make possible the amassing of the corporate wealth of the Euro-Judeo-Christian colonizing nations – and their greed-motivated trading partners.

China and India, the huge redeveloping nations, are beginning to be seen as major economic threats to the dominance by the foremost developed nations. In an attempt to counter China’s potential as a competitive economic superpower – along with calls for a higher valuation of her currency, the threat of tariff increases and the application of import restrictions – Taiwan’s continued separation from the mainland is being fostered and militarily maintained by the West. And, to counter India’s potential, along with the threat of tariff increases and the application of import restrictions – political-cum-military

maneuvering has continued to prevent her fellow Indian peoples: Pakistanis, Bangladeshis and Sri Lankans, from forming a trade-based, economic alliance of the Subcontinent's nations. In addition, xenophobia-based, exclusionary immigration laws are being instituted as a means of denying non-Europeans, mainly Chinese and Indian scientists access to the very sciences that their millennia-old cultures had originally sourced.

[Under the guise of a “New World Order”, the economies of lesser economic powers from amongst the now-developing nations will, if the West’s Judeo-Christian-controlled, multinational, corporate interests have their way, end up just where they were before they gained independence.]

In the past, many of the adherents of religions forbidding the assessing of interest (Catholicism and Mohammedanism) were not prevented from acquiring wealth through other means, licit or otherwise – including, though not limited to, conquest and the enslaving of other peoples (though not necessarily if proselytized). However, once the excess wealth acquired through the subjugation of a conquered and suppressed people was dissipated, they had but a limited, if not a total lack of excess riches. Over the last few centuries, colonizing Islamic and Catholic nations no longer had the means of acquiring newfound wealth: their having originally acquired it through the predatory conquests of militarily-weaker or less militaristic nations – rather than through usurious means and the labor of their own people, in their own countries.

Having acquired the easy living to which the citizens of those nations had grown accustomed, they lost their willingness to work or to die in the acquisition of new lands for the disproportionate benefit of the grown-flabby and

undeserving-of-their-devotion, ineffectual rulers. Many former do-nothing, aristocrat types (which included those individuals who had benefited disproportionately from one or another form of colonialism) attempted to turn their country's cathedrals and countryside estates, along with all the elements of their nation's cultural heritage, into tourist attractions – all as a means of maintaining their own lives of leisure.

Mohammedanism's prohibitions against the assessing of interest has been, more or less, maintained – while usurious practices are no longer banned by the Church. As a consequence, although circuitous means of paying for the use of money have been devised to comply with Islamic law (though not readily available to all Moslems), the negative effects of a ban on the payment of interest has had a detrimental affect on the ability of Moslems to better their living condition – especially when they attempt to compete in the modern world of multinational-control of every aspect of commerce.

As a result, by the late seventeen hundreds, they, Muslim nations, and to a somewhat lesser degree, Catholic nations, due to a residual carry over of past usury-related prohibitions, were no longer economically strong enough to again join with the West in the successful rape (euphemistically called colonization) of poorly-armed, alien lands.

Deprived of the chance to replenish their coffers, those nations were hampered in their attempts to raise risk capital: the basic requirement for a people wishing to engage in today's entrepreneurial, multinational, corporate world. All of which gives logic to the notion that those nations (notably: England and Holland) whose people claim to live by the embedded moral values of the Old Testament-

based, Protestant, Judeo-Christian religions (none of which are known to actively prohibit the practice of usury – or the stealing of a Promised Land – that just happens to be occupied by a non-*chosen-by-God* people), were able to utilize the great wealth amassed from the booty obtained from their former colonies that was sufficient to allow them to continue to control a major part of the economies of much of the rest of the world – including a goodly portion of that of America.

The USA, Australia, New Zealand, much of Canada and South Africa were all lands that were originally colonized primarily by Judeo-Christian-Protestant migrants (whether or not criminal). This resulted in the taking over, lock-stock-and-barrel, of the inherent economic wealth of those colonized lands – with the original “native” populations being killed off, enslaved or marginalized. And, with the possible exception of South Africa, it’s impossible to conceive of the economies of any of those lands ever again being controlled by their earlier native populations.

And so, we see why the goal of so many Moslems is to gain control of their own moneys and resources (OPEC for instance – though OPEC’s doings tend to benefit the West’s oil and energy producers as much, if not more than theirs) – and not necessarily through peaceful or usurious means. And, this holds true for all the world’s wanna-also-be-rich, modern-day redeveloping, developed, developing and even poor nations – many of which are trying to avoid being controlled by the multinational corporations dominated by the world’s greed-motivated, Anglo-American, Judeo-Christian big-money interests. None of this is meant to rationalize as good the heinous actions taken by some from amongst the former made-penurious, former colonized peoples against their conceived enemies.



For some hundred years prior to its dissolution, the Ottoman Empire was being propped up by the Western Powers – both to protect their investments and prevent Russia from obtaining an outlet to the Mediterranean. However, with France and England uniting with Russia against the German and Austro-Hungarian alliance, once WWI broke out, what was left of the Ottoman Empire joined up with the Central Powers. Fearful of Germany’s competitive empire-building intentions, the Brits and French made their ill-advised attempt to prevent the Central Powers from taking over the Suez Canal. In doing so, they tried to invade Turkey (currently the last vestige of the Ottoman Empire). Despite the heroic efforts of the victorious Turkish troops at Gallipoli (the scene of one of Churchill’s more egregious military blunders – the defeat resulted in the wasted death of 33,532 Allied troops, of whom 8,587 were Australian), the once powerful Ottoman Empire, as a result of its having sided with a soon-to-be vanquished Germany, was destined to lose its control over the remnants of its impoverished Islamic Arab lands. As soon as this became apparent – Europe’s greed-motivated colonizers decided that it was more to their advantage to completely destroy the near-defunct Ottoman Empire, and divvy up control of its strategically-placed and potentially-oil-rich lands, than to resurrect it as an easy-to-control puppet state – and as a buffer against possible Russian expansion (Turkey alone would have to suffice – and it has).

In retrospect, one sees that their past poverty had serendipitously caused those far-from-fertile Arab lands to be ignored by the West’s colonizers. And, if one considers that this allowed for the independence and freedom of action for Arab men (though not necessarily for their women), then their poverty was not necessarily such a bad

thing for the citizens of those nations – and the stature of Islam. Of course, the growing need for the oil located in their once impoverished desert lands was to change all that – at least for the select Arab citizenry who were allowed and encouraged by Western interests to acquire the gewgaws touted as being so necessary if they were to lead a modern-day, greed-gratifying life.



Returning to India's Parsi population, many more-recently-arrived Irani-Zoroastrians, wishing to associate themselves with India's patrician Zoroastrians, have begun to speak of themselves as Parsis: claiming: since Parsi is a term for Persian, and since Iran is the modern name for Persia, that they too are Parsis. No doubt, if India's Parsis were of a lower socio-economic order, Irani Zoroastrians would deny having any relation to them. (Much as India's original Parsi population looked down on Irani-Zoroastrians – until the advent of Nazism, German Jews considered Slavic Jews as inferior – and some still do.) So, when discussing Parsis, although the term has, in some sense been broadened, they should probably be considered separate from their Irani fellow religionists. And, along those lines, it should be mentioned that in Mumbai, Parsis (now numbering worldwide some eighty thousand) have built a world-class cultural center. But, it should also be noted that, until a few years back, performing-arts happenings there were listed in daily newspapers – thereby informing a broad cross-section of interested and culture-minded Indians of their happenings.

Perhaps because India is in the process of joining the world in its creed of greed – which sanctions the rights of the wealthy to laud it over their economically less-well-off brethren – few, if any but the least popular doings at Mumbai's renowned performing arts center are still being

advertised. And, on those rare occasions when there's a performance by an orchestra conducted by Zubin Mehta (which are advertised), ticket prices, in rupee terms, are so high that only the very wealthy Indians (often those engaging in India's most popular pastime: tax-dodging?) and the staying-at-five-star-hotel, foreign tourists can afford them.

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What's happening to Mumbai, is much the same as what's going on in America's big cities. In New York City, for some thirty years after WWII, those in the know, with enough money, took advantage of the cheap prices for city property (brought about by the White-flight engendered by both urban and suburban real-estate interests) to buy up buildings and apartments at bargain prices. Likewise, in Indian cities, such as Mumbai (then Bombay) after independence, those folks who had benefited most from the Raj's occupation had the money in hand to buy, at bargain prices, the real-estate vacated by the Brits.

The middle-class, in both New York and Mumbai, has been forced to leave the city's more accessible areas. In India, the ever-increasing cost of real estate is in the process of pricing-out, from South Mumbai, all but the wealthy – and as India's middle-class moves north, the prices go up there, as well. That this parallels what's happening in New York, must surely be another indication that India is fast moving from being a redeveloping nation, to that of a fully-developed one.

[Nevertheless, unless India sharply decreases the number of her people living below the poverty line – it would be remarkable if she makes it. And, although America, currently the world's richest nation, should be ashamed to have to admit that over twenty percent of her people live

below the poverty line, in India, more than half of her people live way below a truly low poverty line.]

Currently, the massive movement to India's cities has, at least for the people living there, mitigated some of the worst aspects of the caste system – albeit, superficially. The flip side to this urbanization is that while caste considerations are being somewhat abated, they're in the process of being replaced by a class system based on money and nepotism. Meanwhile, in claimed-to-be caste-less America, we too are in the process of adopting a class-cum-caste system based on wealth and family affiliations. In both India and America, this establishment of a privileged aristocracy of moneyed, greed-oriented stockholders, landowners, bankers, merchants and their kith and kin, has resulted in an even greater discrepancy between the haves and the have-little-or-nothings. The greed-motivated, successful Mumbaiite can now begin to consider himself as one with his counterpart in New York. And so, in Mumbai, just as in New York, a goodly number of affluent parents give their spoiled and incapable-of-earning-a-living progeny the kind of financial support that enables them, as they go about condescending-to-the-less-fortunate, to wallow in a self-indulgent life of meaningless luxury.



[As an artist, the writer was surprised to find that virtually all comic strips in India were imported. The following is an attempt to determine the reasons for it and its broader implications, both good and bad, for India's cultural and economic future.]

A considerable portion of India's young men and women, after having acquired a subsidized-by-the-Indian-taxpayer college degree, leave the country to seek, if not their fortune, a decent living. In an effort to realize the problems facing India's youths, and why so many look abroad to

satisfy their aspirations, the implications of something seemingly so insignificant, that few if any Indians are fully aware of it – is that virtually all comic strips that one comes across in Indian newspapers (most of which have some – whether or not with blurbs printed in English or in one of India’s numerous languages) originate in the States. Now, why should that be? After all, there’s a more than adequate supply of skilled Indian artists who (if sufficiently motivated) would be capable of doing the artwork; the cost of labor to produce them in India would be far lower than in the States; and India has a plethora of under-employed, educated, intelligent individuals who are surely capable of creating a comic strip. So, why the near-total absence of Indian comic-strip artists in India?

First, let’s accept as fact that the making of an original comic strip, in almost every instance, requires its creator to have both a degree of artistic skills and an intellect capable of creating a credible work. Since Indians are known to have both these attributes, what’s the problem? Here’s the rub. In India, physical skills are what workmen acquire – and the residual effects of caste considerations (intensified by the negative attitude towards manual labor by a rising moneyed middle-class) continue to permeate the psyche of virtually all Indians. Moreover, this predilection was reinforced amongst English-speaking Indians by the colonial Raj’s class-based, condescending attitude towards the laboring classes in India (as it was then, and still is in England). And, the acquisition of manual skills, artistic or not, are to this date considered a social downer (except when minimally acquired by well-to-do, well-placed ladies and gentlemen playing at being artists).

[In India, the acquiring of a formal education that’s little more than a few years, if that, is the norm for some half of her living-in-poverty population. As a consequence, India has a plethora of unskilled and semi-skilled laborers – all

eager to work for food and a place to sleep – and any pay offered. There can even be a feeling amongst India's middle-class that doing menial work takes jobs away from the poor – but that seems to be a hypocritical rationale.]

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In a country like India, where degrees are most respected, anyone with a fine-arts degree is automatically considered an artist. And, much like their counterparts in the West, mighty few of those bearers of fine-arts degrees (with the added caste-based negative inputs) have acquired the skills required if one is to be considered a true master of the fine arts.

Much as in America's South and Mid-West, where intellect and knowledge are considered suspect attributes – and those exhibiting them are resented by its Judeo-Christian, middling majority – during India's colonial-era past, intellect was suspect and intellectuals were resented by the Raj (they were, at the very least considered uppity). Despite this, Indians (even the most Anglophilic), regardless of caste, continue to consider evidence of intellect as an admirable trait. Perhaps it's that intelligence was considered as an innate attribute of high-caste Hindus, that moneyed Indians, regardless of their caste or religion, were so eager to appropriate for themselves an ego-inflating facade of great intellect – while also scorning all forms of manual labor. Nevertheless, those few working artists (in India, as in England) who acquire great wealth, due to the marketability of their manual skills, do tend to raise their status somewhat from that of tolerated laborers to that of tolerated creative geniuses. This holds true, especially if an artist's work is owned by a sufficiently large group of well-to-do *patrons of the arts*, who had purchased it on the cheap – before the price of the artist's work increased precipitously.

In addition to the detrimental effects of class-based, negative attitudes towards the acquisition of manual skills (which, despite her huge population, accounts for India's poor showing currently – in all but Raj-era, upper-class, athletic events) there are those of a puritanical nature that curtail the use of attitude-based life classes for artists and students. In India, the hiring of obese old women and half-clothed scrawny boys as models who sit inertly in life-study classes for wannabe artists and illustrators, is the norm. Yet, knowledge of the human body is, in most instances, a prerequisite if one is to have the ability to draw a credible cartoon character – let alone a recognizable figure – draped or not.

Although in recent years it's become lawful for an artist or gallery in India to display a work that includes a nude, there remains the ever-present religious and cultural restrictions regarding the exhibition of the undraped body (it's considered immoral, irreligious and an embarrassment). The result is that the overwhelming majority of drawings and paintings by professional artists of clothed figures, as well as of nudes, whether male or female, manifest a near-total disregard, or ignorance, of what makes a body tick (with few exceptions, this becomes apparent even in those works having what is obviously intended to be deliberate stylistic distortions of the figure). And, these culture-based restrictions act as just one more barrier encountered by those Indian artists who might otherwise be inclined to create a home-grown comic strip.

All this notwithstanding, despite those culture-based deterrents (those of a caste-based and religious nature or due to a carry over of Victorian-era prudery) faced by India's middle-class artists, there should still be a sufficient number of talented, potential comic-strip artists to be found amongst India's billion-plus people.

So, what's the primary reason for the dearth of comic-book artists in India? It has to do with money. American comic strips are syndicated. The result is that the real money is earned upon their initial publication in American and other Western newspapers. As a consequence, anything earned from their publication in India (where almost all the comic strips appear to be a month or so out-of-date when published) is found money. In effect, the comics are being dumped on India at prices so low, that even exceedingly low-income-earning Indians can't compete. This is probably the most important factor leading up to the reason why (although there are a few excellent political cartoonists) there are virtually no Indian comic-strip artists – in India.

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Now then, if it were just the loss of jobs for India's potential comic-strip artists, this would be but a tempest in a teapot. After all, Indians, through their information-technology and pharmaceutical industries, as well as from the outsourcing by the West of service jobs to India, benefit exponentially more from such trade with the fully-developed nations, than do Americans from their dominance in the making and selling of syndicated comic strips. However, it's not the economic impact of the dumping in India of comic strips, it's because it's accompanied by the importation of, and consequential exposure to, a plethora of literature, movies, TV serials and manifestations of every aspect of the performing arts (virtually all of which are funneled through the English-speaking, developed nations) that it takes on an importance. It's the effects of all this, which act as a massive, propaganda campaign (whether or not intentional), that so affects India's economy and her people's self-esteem as Indians.

[Nevertheless,, in the long run, those pro-West influences may very well prove a positive, at least economics-wise, for India and many of her educated youths.]

The result of this probably unintentional brainwashing of India's average, educated, English-speaking middle-class has led to a mad rush by her manufacturers, bottlers and low-level entrepreneurs to take part in the West's now-made-moral, Judeo-Christian, greed-is-good world of the multinational. All of which is resulting in the selling-off of many of India's indigenous resources to those West-controlled organizations – especially to those with universally-recognized names. By the onset of the third millennium of this era, India's naive, wannabe-hip members – from the well-to-do classes, on down economically to street panhandlers, were convinced that over-priced soda and bottled water, junk food, clothing, footwear and luxury automobiles, as long as they bore publicized-in-the-West logos, were necessities of life. (Meanwhile, as previously stated, half of India's population of one billion souls still live in poverty.)



India's burgeoning information technology and pharmaceutical industries have managed to hold their own (as of the onset of the twenty-first century) when competing in the world of multi-billion-dollar-valued multinational corporations. Nevertheless, those industries are far from capable of absorbing India's huge pool of intellectual talent, and when augmented by their having been on the receiving end of movies, literature, TV programs and advertisements that describe and extol the Western way of life, it becomes obvious why there's the headlong drive by so many of India's potentially-most-productive citizens to migrate to the more developed nations: those in need of their talents: talents enhanced by their ability to speak, read and write media-induced, idiomatic American-English.

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America's recently-erected, 9/11-rationalized and racially-motivated barriers to the hiring of Indian scientists, the extended wait for, and often denial of visas to university-bound Indian (as well as Chinese) students and potential IT employees, along with the xenophobia-based harassment by shield-bearing otherwise-unemployables at airports, have all acted to keep more and more Indians (and other Indo-Mediterranean types) at home – which had the unintended effect of both harming America and benefiting India – in the long run.

Indiscriminate application of America's near-draconian Homeland Security Laws has resulted in America's loss of a major source of intelligent youths (coming from many other affected nations, as well as India) willing and able to work in the science-based fields. Many of those youths, when denied visas, were eagerly welcomed by America's technology using competitors. Those who remained in India became the well-paid (buying-power-wise) workers in the outsourced-to-India, diagnostic, back-office and service departments of a variety of American organizations and multi-national corporations. When well-educated, middle-class Indians are refused visas and not permitted to immigrate to America, it acts to energize India's own industries. *No wonder that serendipity resulted from a stay in a South Asian nation.*

Despite their being needed to fill positions Americans either don't want or can't fill, many Indian professionals: engineers, doctors, scientists and their ilk, have stopped coming to America. The cause: the hassle in trying to obtain a visa, and then, even if granted, the knowledge that they'd be harassed by often-racist US Customs agents and security personnel at airports — all of which has worked to quell their desire to seek admission to enter the States.

What must be most disheartening for those Indians oriented to Western cultural ways (especially those whose world-class educations were obtained at the expense of India's citizenry), is that despite their adding so much to the economic strength of the already dominant position of America and the other developed nations, their presence is so often resented by the ordinary citizenry in the West – whether as immigrants or highly-skilled temporary residents.

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Still Life -- 1985 (oil)

IV

Contemporary Art And The Politically Correct

During the course of the twentieth century there was a progressive de-emphasizing of the skills, talent and knowledge normally required of artists (if they were to have the ability to manifest their genius). And, it is this, that was most responsible for establishing a disconnect between what had been categorized as Modern Art and what is considered Contemporary Art. As fine art transitioned from Modern Art into the catchall term Contemporary Art, fine art was to lose its connection to humanity's universal psyche – that which distinguishes mankind from his (or her) fellow evolutionary-formed beings.

Due to the concurrent propositions that everything could be considered Contemporary Art and all those doing it were to be considered artists (who may or may not lack the skill, knowledge and talent enabling them to actually produce a creative object – but do have the ability to rationalize any evidence of their ineptitude, if and when they attempt to display something they've produced), a fine-arts degree was to become imperative. This, since there are no other means (other than receiving a favorable critique from a celebrity critic claiming to be an authority; a PR'd, mega-money-bought reputation or an in with a museum curator) of giving a legitimacy, as art, to the work of those claiming to be artists.

[An unintentional happenstance resulting from all this, is that even when the great inspirational art of the past is being exhibited in a major museum, it's being so over-analyzed by a gaggle of curators bearing the misnomered honorific, "Master" of Fine Art, that the work loses its ability to project its non-verbal, ethereal aspects – for the enjoyment and enlightenment of both the frequent and casual museum goer.]

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In America, as the last half of the twentieth century unfolded, Modern Art had gradually evolved into something claimed by the all-knowing intelligentsia to be Contemporary Art. However, its being contemporary is hardly a distinctive classification; the physical remains of graphic works that included the inept attempts by incompetent, would-be artists of every historical period has always existed – but few would consider those works to be anything more, if that, than cultural curiosities. The only reasonable definition for what's currently passing for fine art would be: Contemporary Art: A hodgepodge of work ranging from the commonplace academic to manifestations of genius requiring a verbose application of an illusory art-history-based jargon capable of convincing hoi polloi unsophisticates of its being art (though, at the very best, it could be considered a conglomeration of collectable cultural curiosities).

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Virtually all those artists considered major honchos of the New York School had, prior to their withdrawal into nonobjective art, acquired (or at least attempted to acquire) the skills needed if they were to manifest their concepts, emotions or observations. And, it was this ability that enabled so many of them to give a validity, as fine art, to

their otherwise tradition-breaking (avant garde) work. Not so the makers of America's neo-academic art. Nowadays, college-bred art junkies self-servingly claim: that the celebrated avant garde exhibit at the armory in 1913 acted, retroactively, as the segue from Modern Art to much of the otherwise-meaningless daubings, constructions and conceptual works that have been rationalized, over the last decades of the twentieth century, as Contemporary Art.

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In America, the result of the coupling of the need to abide by the musts of the politically correct and the concurrent, all-encompassing, non-definition of art, is that critics tend not to be critical – at least in so far as any meaningful, art-based criteria are concerned. And to some degree, this holds true for poetry, as well – but only negligibly; though, it too must conform to the all-inclusive demands of the politically correct and accept the expansion of the parameters of what's considered poetry. Nevertheless, since the overwhelming majority of America's wannabe poets are literate and have been culturally immersed from childhood in the writing of a somewhat comprehensible English – they have at least a modicum of the verbal skills (though not necessarily the genius) required to manifest something resembling a poem based on their emotions, concepts and visions. However, even the having of a comparable modest ability is no longer required for those folks currently calling themselves artists.

The issuing of fine-arts degrees requiring but passing grades in the least demanding courses, intellectual-wise – did benefit universities in many ways besides enabling them to fill their treasuries. This, by enabling them to meet their politically-correct quotas by enrolling selected minorities in an academic-lite course other than physical education – as well as the ability to hire degree-bearing minorities as faculty in their non-intellectually-challenging arts courses.

[Although a few students may have benefited in some way from taking the less demanding courses – in general, those who did were short changed – this, by their not being forced, just as virtually all students are, to take intellectually challenging courses that could, not only increase their body of knowledge, but also sharpen their minds (much as physical exertion builds muscle – which makes it possible for athletes to better their performance). Those students, whether or not minorities, who are allowed, if not encouraged to take snap courses, merely aid the elitist and money-making educational entities to avoid changing their real agenda, which is to continue, without interference, to cater to the needs of the money-endowing, privileged few.]

One can see that in a sense, some segments of society benefited, at least monetarily, from the obliteration of the boundaries that once defined fine art. Nevertheless, when one considers the long-term ill effects, it can't really be justified. The individualist, going-it-alone artist; the past belief that skill, knowledge and genius are essential requisites if one is to be a maker of fine art; and the concept that art is an uplifting, visually-induced, cultural and aesthetic experience – are all in the process of being lost.

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In essence, a worthy-of-praise painting that's capable of expanding a viewer's awareness of the human condition and conception (by appealing to the mind's eye) of just what the boundaries are for considering a work as art – as well as a deserving-of-acclaim poem that stirs and stretches the reader's imagination, are no different. Both are the results of their makers' manifesting a personal concept – which, when successful, transcends their being merely subjective abstractions (in the form of verbal or visual

displays of perceived realities) and become, eventually and potentially, universally accepted truths. Yet, no matter how close to (or removed from) reality, those truths can never be anything more than shorthand versions of phantasmagoria manifested in accordance with the subjective determinations of their creators.

With notable exceptions, it's rare, indeed, for architects, choreographers, composers and their ilk to have the skills sufficient to render justice to the manifestation of their own creations; which are almost always best when brought to fruition by others: highly skilled professionals. However, in the making of fine art or poetry, the most notable results occur when a work is conceived and created by the same individual: one with the knowledge and skills that enable its creator to manifest his or her creative genius. The end result is then arrived at through an indeterminate series of egocentric decisions – each decided by the perceived effects of the previous one. And, although it's conceivable that an artist or poet might converse with others as a sounding board or as a means of solving a technical problem (one that once-solved enables the creator to realize an ego-satisfying resolution), in no way should that imply that joint decision-making (insofar as the creation of a painting or a poem is concerned) is required to produce great works of art. (If there are consequential paintings or poems produced as a result of a collaboration, offhand, the writer can't think of any.)

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Nowadays, fine arts and poetry, at least to some degree, are going in the same direction. Their makers, promoters and critics tend to reach their determinations based on a tacit agreement that either or both the subject matter and maker must be in compliance with present-day concepts of what constitutes the politically correct (or, if not in conformity,

that the subject be so outrageous that it earns a financially-exploitable notoriety). On the face of it, where subject matter and employment are based on arbitrary criteria, one would be hard put to see anything outrageously wrong with adhering to the demands of the politically correct. However, due to the currently accepted-by-the-ignoranti assertion that every human endeavor is to be considered art – and everyone doing it an artist – the conjunction between this assertion and the politically correct has proven to make ludicrous the very concept of what passes today for a contemporary fine art.

The net effect of all this is that currently there are no criteria for determining what art is (or what poetry is, for that matter). What is exhibited as fine art, ends up requiring a verbal explanation of why it's being exhibited; what the maker's intent was, and what it all means. Much like the need for a fortuneteller to give meaning to the lines on your palm, an authority, in this case an art critic, is required to interpret the output of anyone claiming to be an "artist". And, by doing so, validity is given to the work by the critic (and keep in mind that even prominent art critics are beholden to the commercial world's powers-that-be for their employment). Now, it's one thing when explanatory annotations appear on works created by and for foreign peoples or for Shakespearean sonnets and their ilk, with their terms and expressions of a bygone era (though, no matter how good the explanation, it's never possible to get the real, time-and-place impact of those works). However, it's quite another thing when artists or poets (or someone else in their behalf) have to explain to their contemporaries just what they're seeing or reading. By doing so, the creators are acknowledging that their works are failures – and as such, there was no reason, aesthetic or otherwise, for their exhibition or publication in the first place.

Presenting a near-blank sheet of paper, a white-on-white painting or an amateurish figurative scribble, might, at least the first time, be considered a thought-provoking work of art. However, anyone well-placed financially and socially – or who's a beneficiary of the dictates of the politically correct, has the ability of getting away with imitating and then repeating, ad nauseam, those earlier experimental works – which, currently, are more often than not, accepted, if not lauded as high art. Moreover, it's only due to the embracing, by the ignorant, of the nonsensical claim that everything must be considered art, that the vast majority of what is now passing for Contemporary Art is not being laughed away for its being nothing more than self-indulgent, intellectualized crap. This current lack of meaningful criteria, has led to the buying and publishing of works of dubious consequence – as well as praise and financial support for their makers – especially if and when they or their works conform to the *self-serving* demands of the politically correct.

[Adherence to the requirements of the politically correct can hardly be a panacea for the societal ills associated with the worst aspects of a survival-of-the-fittest, money-dominated democracy, with its current, unrestrained stress on greed. What is needed is the setting of broad-based goals intended to benefit all citizens. Economically-available educational opportunities for all, starting with adequately funded head-start programs, and on through a university education; the establishment of a minimum wage that allows a worker to live above the poverty level; the ability for all to have a crack at obtaining: affordable housing; medical care and legal advice – are what's required if individuals are to have the right to function as individuals – which would also give an equal opportunity for art and its makers to flourish. Instead, we have the misguided piecemeal attempts to placate a constantly-changing segment of America's all-inclusive multitude of

hyphenates, by favoring the most outspoken minority-du-jour. This, under the guise of a do-gooder attempt at being fair.]

When it's easier to be politically correct, than it is to be critical (where the effects of skill, knowledge and genius are involved), the views of paid critics lose whatever credibility they ever enjoyed. Fearing claims of bigotry, critics and reviewers, while hiding behind the currently-accepted, Candide-like premise that in this best of all possible worlds everything is art and everyone's an artist, find, in all-too-many instances, the most ludicrous reasons for praising works created by members of any group considered a deprived minority (or a member of the wealthy upper-crust – or a celebrity).

[From the mid-1900's on, with the lack of any accepted criteria for determining the artistic worth of a work of art (and it probably could also apply to poetry), a poignant saying was bandied about amongst New York's serious artists (and possibly those worldwide) – which has to do with the road to success. And, although it may very well be nothing more than sour grapes, the saying was: "It's who you know, and who you blow, and who you go to bed with," that's the determining factor. And, when there's a hell of a lot of smoke, you can bet your bottom dollar that there's a fire – if not a conflagration.]

Some could rightly counter by saying that this is hardly any worse than when in the past, contacts, money and appeals to bigotry-based prejudices (of one sort or another) could earn a favorable review or critique – and a circle of buyers.

[A noted critic of the New York School was known to demand a painting from any artist before granting him a positive critique. And, before his death in 1959, even the famed art critic, Bernard Berenson admitted, that in order

to earn a fee, he authenticated a painting and thereby its provenance – despite his having grave doubts about it. If these actions could be considered unique, and if the works resulting from the many commendations bestowed on them by these gentlemen were not hanging in many of the most prestigious museums, there'd hardly be any reason to single them out for condemnation. But their money-grubbing actions were not unique, and works commended by them (and their fellow travelers) do hang in major museums.]

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One cause for the lowering of standards in the graphic and plastic arts, can be traced to the effects of the draft during the Vietnam War. As one of the means of avoiding the draft and having to fight in a war that few young men thought important enough to risk life and limb for (and for less noble reasons, as well), graduate school was one of the answers (the outing by homosexuals, was another). The longer one stayed in college, the less chance of being drafted. Earlier, the art degrees that were issued by universities were in art history. If one wanted to be an artist, art schools or academies were the answer; respected institutions of higher learning gave no credit towards the obtaining of a fine-arts degree based on time spent painting or sculpting in a studio. Moreover, it's highly doubtful that many of the respected artists of the past could have endured the kind of constraints on their independent thinking – that would have been required – if one were to obtain an academic (BA or MA) degree in art history.

Whether it was the result of money-hungry universities' trying to cash in on the lucrative tuitions of a slew of young men wishing to take snap courses as a means of dodging the draft, or was an honest belief, on the universities' part, that by pushing the sale of fine-arts degrees based on verbalized

rationalizations of incompetence is good – is perhaps a debatable matter. What is evident, is that the issuing of fine-arts degrees did facilitate the universities' ability to cash-in on the demands for a draft-deferring education – despite this entailing their lowering of academic standards. And this they did, as a means of obtaining the paid admissions from students taking courses that guaranteed their avoiding the draft – while at the same time, granting them a college degree. The result was the establishment of courses leading to a degree in *Fine Arts* (though in some cases this had preceded the rush to avoid the draft) – at which time majoring in studio work took precedence over those in science, language, philosophy and such.

Moreover, to ensure that the lack of a hand-to-eye coordination didn't prevent an art student from obtaining and paying for four to six years of classes leading to a degree, the claims of the advocates of what was to be called *Contemporary Art*: that the skills formerly required by anyone calling himself or herself an artist would no longer be obligatory, were eagerly adopted by even well-endowed universities. And, this concept, which was as fraudulent for the plastic arts as it would have been for a music teacher to encourage a tone-deaf student to pay for years of lessons, while claiming that it would lead to his becoming a concert pianist, didn't seem to bother the bursars of academia – who may have also taken into consideration the concept that with so many eligible young men majoring in fine-arts courses, young ladies with equally questionable credentials (both academic and artistic) would be sure to follow.

This was a time when do-good, feel-good Americans were touting, with Bible-like authority, the notion that everything and anything is art and anyone who makes it, an artist. Universities latched onto this concept with all the gusto of a starving glutton; with no traditional determinant, universities could set their own criteria for determining

grades for the issuing of fine-arts degrees. Students' grades were to be based on their ability to verbalize and rationalize the evidence of their competence – or incompetence – whichever the case might be. And, little or no consideration would be given for evidence of any sort of skill that could enable the student to manifest his or her concepts graphically.

There was another reason why institutions of learning were so eager to abide by the nonsensical contention, that everything's art and everyone's an artist. It allowed them to comply with the basically-reasonable requirements of the politically correct – which made it obligatory for those institutions to show that they were neither racist nor sexist (guilty, which most were, until proven otherwise). They had no trouble in finding women to fill teaching positions (those were pre-feminist times, when many young women, guilt-ridden for having been chosen as instructors above men who were often equally, if not better qualified, competed with any intelligent, manly student). However, since America's minorities (Latinos, Asians and especially African-American males) had only recently breached the barriers to their even trying to attain social, educational and economic equality with America's Euro-Judeo-Christian majority, finding qualified minority men to teach the more demanding academic courses was difficult, and often near-impossible. The solution was to hire them as art (or as physical-education) instructors – often waving the strictest of academic requirements. At first, since there was a large number of qualified artists available (which included those of every conceivable minority grouping), this appeared to be a satisfactory solution for all concerned.

However, in time, with every educational institution eager to cash in on the tuition-paying-students' zeal for obtaining a fine-arts degree, the supply of skilled artists as instructors, whether or not minorities, dried up. Unmoved, educational

institutions realized that there was a readily-available solution. As a result of so many men (women as well, but for other reasons) having taken snap courses in order to evade the draft, universities had been churning out degree-bearing, fine-arts students: all with the ability to pass their tests; few with the talent or skills required to be a graphic or plastic-arts artist. This outpouring resulted in a more than sufficient supply of potential instructors (many of whom, fortuitously, for the universities, were minorities) with MFA degrees – which, in turn, allowed educational institutions to continue, as in the past, to hire a lopsided majority of preferred non-minorities as instructors, while hiring a sufficient number of minorities with fine-arts degrees (to go along with those in phys-ed) as a means of maintaining a required, politically-correct teaching staff.

Due to the demand for fine-arts degrees, anyone with an easy-to-acquire MFA degree (most of whom were not members of an officially-scheduled minority) was considered qualified to be an art instructor (with the overflow spread throughout the art world). The consequence of all this was that, from the mid-seventies on, the I'm-a-genius, lacking-in-talent holders of MFA degrees were to influence the making, selling, buying and exhibiting of what currently passes for fine art.

Within a few years following the end of the draft, enrollment in the MFA classes was to fall precipitously. Along with those avoiding the draft (and their coterie), the Vietnam-era veterans, having used up their paid-by-the-government tuitions, also stopped going for fine-art degrees. As a result, there was no longer a need for universities to hire new MFA-degree-bearing instructors; this caused all-too-many unemployable MFAs to try their hand at manifesting their artistic skills. This, in turn, led to one of the more significant inputs leading to the lowering of

the stature of the plastic and graphic fine arts; the resultant plethora of jobless, un- and semi-skilled bearers of MFA degrees who became intent on claiming their right to be considered artists, would be near, if not at, the top of the list of the causes of that decline.

In New York, what financed the doings of those degree'd artists, when not their parents or working for good but nevertheless, non-union wages while converting artist's lofts into rich-folks' pads, was the availability of a plethora of handouts offered to MFAs and their ilk by one or another sponsoring foundation. Sizable monetary grants were given out to wannabe artists; but few, if any, were based on the awardees' having skills that could enable their manifesting any evidence of their proclaimed genius. What counted most, was their hyphenated-American classification: innumerable grants stipulated one or another geographic, ethnic, racial, religious, sexual, age, educational or other qualifying requirement. Those with creative-writing skills, and the ability and willingness to cater to the prejudices of the benevolent (though often for tax-avoiding or ego-building reasons) endowerers of prestigious and not-so prestigious foundations, who managed to wend their way through the maze of complex provisions, were often rewarded with a grant. This process (taught in universities), which had given rise earlier to the term **grantsmanship*, was to greatly benefit those applicants who had fine-arts degrees (mighty few of whom could be counted amongst the most deserving, economic- or talent-wise from within the most deserving minorities).

**Grantsmanship: The ability to grapple with the often-bizarre stipulations laid out if one is to qualify for a cash award.*

The more grants one gets, the more one is apt to obtain still more. It's a little like someone who's on welfare who's

automatically entitled to food stamps – and handouts from other government and non-government organizations. Of course, in the case of the overwhelming majority of welfare recipients, those folks, through no fault of their own, have been marginalized: socially, financially and educationally. Whether or not there's any proof that society benefits from welfare assistance doesn't really matter – whether directly or indirectly, the unfairness inherent in an economic social system that's rooted in greed-based, free-market principles, is the cause of the impoverished state of most welfare recipients. There are those, and that includes the writer, who believe that by alleviating the inequities forced on those living in poverty, the entire American commune benefits economically: the middle-class, along with those whose privileges of wealth are no longer in jeopardy – as well as the needy. And, if that's not enough of a reason, then by our offering welfare to the impoverished, which can serve to alleviate our well-deserved communal guilt for having allowed their sorry state to exist – should be.

Now then, let's take a look at the results of grant-giving (a form of welfare for those claiming to be deserving artists – in a world where everyone's an artist and everything's art). Much like welfare to the poor, giving financial aid to artists could have a beneficial effect on society. It keeps some wannabe artists from taking jobs as waiters away from wannabe actors – and it makes those sponsoring the grants believe that they're contributing to the advancement of the arts (and for some, this belief counters any feelings of guilt that they might have due to the tax benefits they may have received).

With few new teaching jobs available, but with money from grants conditionally obtainable – and with the fact that having received a grant from one organization acts as a recommendation that assures the acquiring of one from a second organization – and so on, grants, which are there for

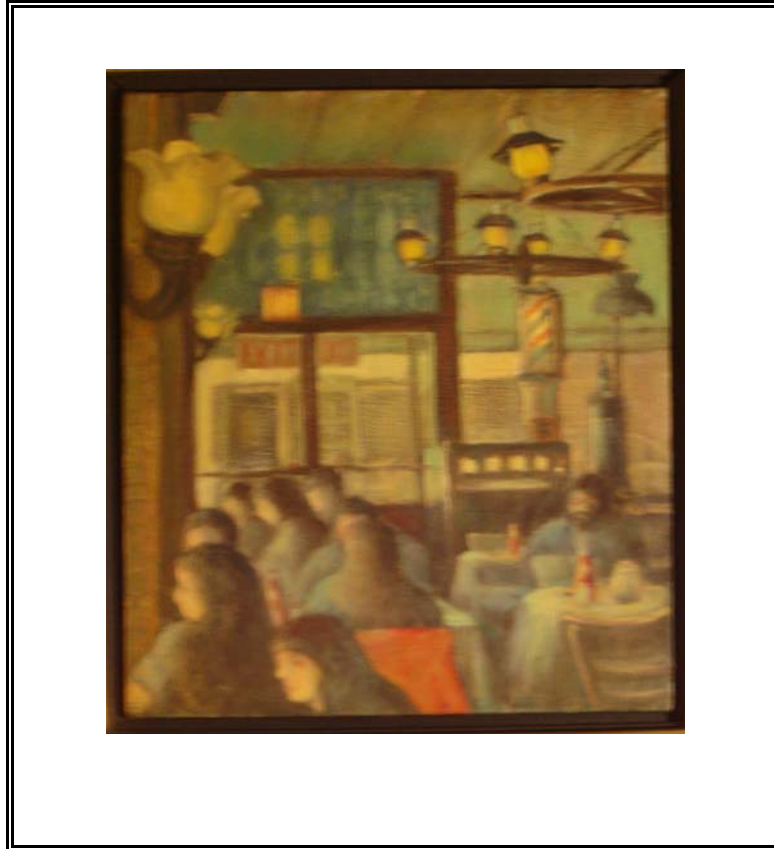
the taking by those in the know on the workings of grantsmanship, are a major contributor to the welfare of slues of wannabe artists with MFA degrees. These MFAs, whether or not with any art-based, graphic or plastic skills, were being exhibited – and their work (due to the prestige earned from their having received one or more grants) was given serious consideration as fine art. Although there were a few with skills sufficient to make a credible artistic statement, on the whole (take a good look at the politically-correct art exhibited in major art museums) their work has remained an embarrassment.

The brightest of the crop of MFAs included a sufficient number of America's far-from-privileged youths to allow universities to continue to meet their required quotas of minority instructors. However, with the more prestigious and higher-paying universities able to attract the most competent amongst them, all that was left was a raft of relatively talent-less men and women, whose status as artists was based on their ability to have rationalized the evidence of their incompetence – as a means of their acquiring a fine-arts degree. As a result, few of those remaining MFAs who were hired as instructors, whether or not minorities, had the ability to manifest their verbalized concepts, or to assist a student in acquiring the skills to do so. Accordingly, conceptual art, which required little or no skill, was fostered. With instructors who lacked the know-how to assist students in acquiring the skills that could enable those who wished to manifest their creativity, virtually all the students attending secondary universities ended up either producing work requiring a verbal rationalization of their shortcomings – or the verbal rationalizing of a claimed visual concept.

As anyone witnessing an exhibition of Contemporary Art can see, the world of fine art has changed dramatically. Contemporary Art can be anything and everything, and if

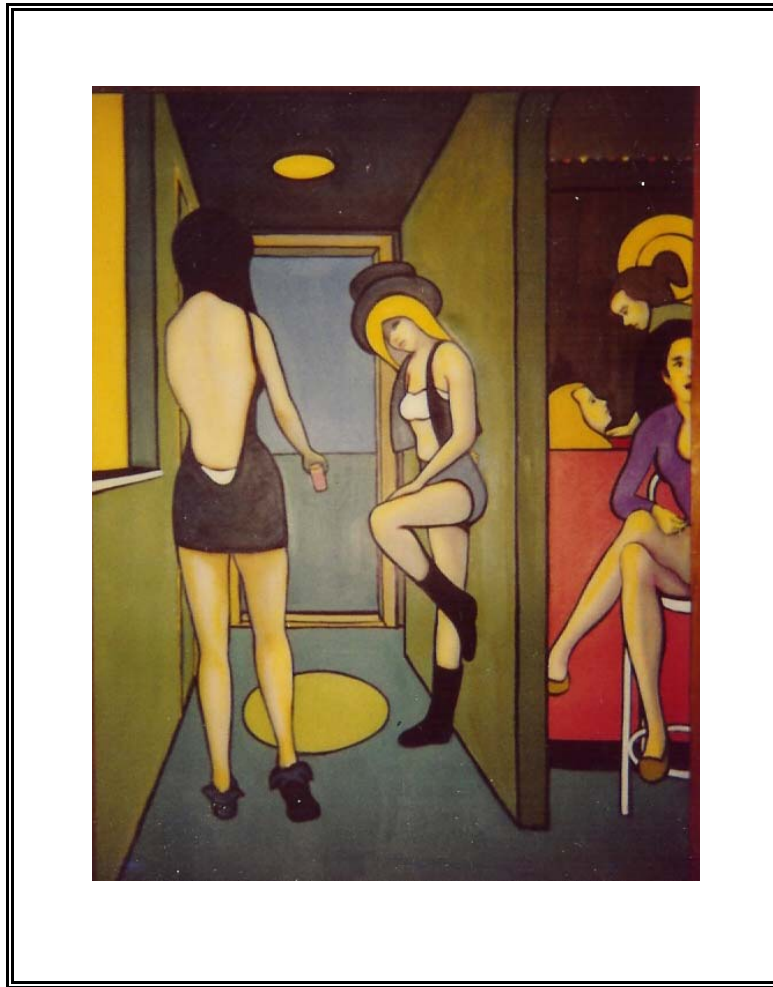
no parameters exist for it, it can't logically be defined. So, like much of mankind's inexplicable presumptions about God and such, which are based on the ineffable, so too must the current outpouring of unintelligible verbiage (those critiques of what is currently being classified as Contemporary Art) remain unverifiable interpretations of an unfathomable mystery. And, although the indescribable may very well exist, most folks making a living by professing to know what it is, have turned out to be little more than charlatans.





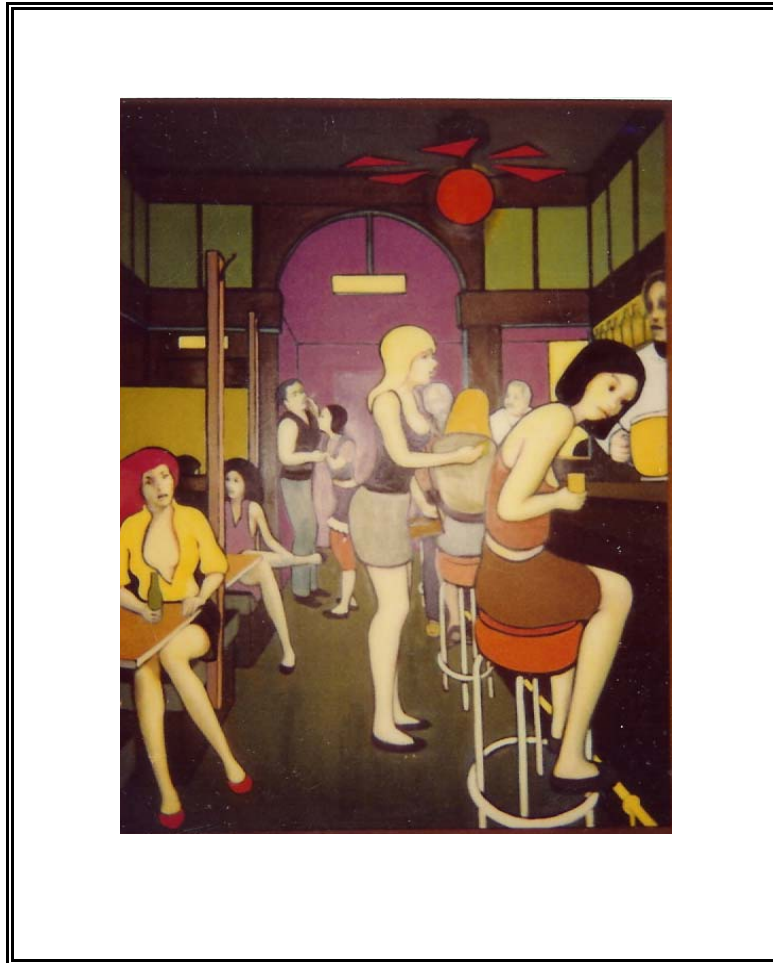
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West Village – 1970's (oil)



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East Village – 1980's (oil)



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East Village – 1980's (oil)

V

Academic Art

vs.

Non-Objective Art and Everything Else

Religion's effect on a people's attitude towards the human figure has played a major part in determining the kind of art that those people create. And if the resultant art is fostered by a dominant, universally-accepted culture, then the effects of that religion-based attitude toward the figure, will affect the making of art worldwide — regardless of national boundaries.

Although it appears that religious belief of one sort or another has accounted for the financing of much of what has come down to us as fine art, it's been the dominant society's attitude towards the human body that's been the major influence on the interpretive, stylistic aspect of figurative art – and art in general. And this might very well have been the case for the tiny crude sculpture, the Venus of Willendorf, which is usually described as a fertility Goddess of some kind (though, some might consider it stone-age porn) – after all, it's quite possible that its creator, if not out of his own primitive pocket, so to speak – was paid for his skill, genius and labor in barter, of one sort or another.

The who pays for it and the reason for its being made – when added to the influence of the ethical inputs of the time and place – have always been the determining inputs for the making of fine art (and this holds true for everything that's currently being touted as just that).

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As every college-bred art aficionado has been taught: Clement Greenberg, almost single-handedly, gave credence to the post-war (WWII) New York School of artists. The result of all this was that artwork with a figurative or realistic subject matter was considered commercial art – or, even more condescendingly, the daubings of a Sunday painter. And only Picasso, despite (or perhaps because of) his unsurpassed drafting ability, managed to maintain his reputation as a respected, great working artist – while remaining an unreserved (non-academic) realist. However, Picasso's anti-fascist masterpiece, *Guernica*, may very well have contributed to his acceptance by war-time-America's elite aesthetes. MoMA's temporary acquisition of *Guernica*, had been, until its being shipped out to non-Franco Spain, the museum's major attraction.

During those years including and surrounding WWII – when no one was asked his religion (and when most born-Americans, including Catholics and Jews, took on the affectation of being some kind of a non-denominational, generic, bordering-on-the-Agnostic Protestant) any artist whose art had been denigrated in Germany, had his work exhibited and praised – especially in New York.

A beneficiary of this was Max Beckmann whose art had been deemed degenerate by the Nazis (similar art, though for its perceived upper-class sophistication, had been banned by Communist Russia). Beckmann's work went

beyond the academic, which gave great power to his paintings – thereby adding to their political impact.

Though not Jewish – it was assumed by many that Beckmann was – which may very well have determined the criticism or acceptance of his work. Some considered it to be unquestionable fine art. More academically minded viewers overlooked his masterly use of color and design and saw his work as mere illustrations – which, despite their museum acceptance, failed as works of fine art. Why? Because, they were considered as having the superficial short-lived impact of caricatures – being merely overwrought political cartoons.

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As any modern-day museum-goer can attest, from a historical standpoint, Modern Art, with the advent of Impressionism, began to hit its stride during the last half of the nineteenth century. However, these days, what tends to be ignored, is that for America's common man, Modern Art, at least up until the advent of WWII, was, if thought about at all, merely a curiosity: something longhaired artsy folks wrote, read and talked about. And, even in sophisticated New York, prior to the doings of the New York School of Abstract Expressionism, Academic Art (which, by then, had included the less radical aspects of Impressionism and Dali-like Surrealism) was the only art form accepted by the average American museum goer. Even those New York artists whose work, though figurative, ventured beyond the hard and fast rules of the academic, were disparaged: ergo, the "Ashcan" School of painters. Another example, one that continued well into the 1970's, was the doings at a once prestigious association of WASPy, academic renderers: the Salmagundi Club of New York. It maintained a barber-shop quartet – whose most popular ditty was one berating the works of Picasso.



By banning the exhibition of the outpourings of the avant-garde in favor of academic Social Realist paintings, the totalitarian governments of Soviet Russia and Fascist Germany gained the support of their common man. Even the more intelligent men and women amongst the average citizenry of those nations, and their satellites, felt marginalized and humiliated, due to their appearing stupid; it was impossible for them to fathom the rationalizing jargon required to comprehend the aesthetic value of those works claiming to be avant-garde. Good-old-fashioned Academic Art was easy for them to comprehend – whereas, the new-fangled, elitist art required lots of intellectualizing and rationalizations to give it meaning. For hoi polloi – as a purely visual experience – the works by the avant-garde had no significance. As a consequence the common folks in those tyrannical states accepted, wholeheartedly, the propaganda embedded in those super-academic, social-realism paintings.

[However, one must not forget, that during the years preceding and during WWII, we, the good guys, had our Norman Rockwell – whose sugar-coated, idealized scenes of Americana and rah-rah-for-our-side, sentimental illustrations were being accepted, as real art, by America's middling classes. And his works, at least at that time, were never openly knocked by our patriotic intelligentsia. Meanwhile, contemporaneously, the work of the realist, but socialist, Rockwell Kent, was shunned.]

[A half century later, in New York, a mayor (some have called him a neo-fascist) attempted to ban the exhibiting of what he claimed was politically-incorrect, non-academic art. And, in his doing so, he had the support of many of the very same sort of folks who had supported the initial

enthronement of both Hitler and Stalin. It should also be noted that within a decade, that same ex-mayor (now considered as being in the liberal wing of the Republican party) willingly served as an attack dog for a bordering-on-totalitarianism administration – this, as a means of countering the popularity of a somewhat liberal presidential candidate. And, despite seeming to be something of a non sequitur – this should serve to remind history-aware folks of the politically divisive years leading up to the formation of Europe’s pre-WWII, despotic governments.]



In New York, there were many realist, American artists who were ethnic Jews (though hardly big names: the Soyers, Brackman, and Phillips come readily to mind). Nevertheless, despite those artists, as instructors, having students coming from every faith, Abstract Expressionism, possibly because of Greenberg’s input, was seen by many-ignorant-of-art-history realists, as being a Jewish thing.

[However, as proof that bigotry and losers go hand in hand, a young, recent arrival from Ireland, who claimed to be a colorist (non-objective) artist, was heard to infer, as an excuse for his lack of drawing skills, that realism is a Jewish thing.]

What boggles the mind, is that even decades after the demise of the New York School (and the continuing presence of innumerable non-Jewish abstract painters), for many folks, non-objective art is still considered a liberal thing, with Jewish roots. This was an obvious carryover from a pre-Neocon time, when, somewhat erroneously, Orthodox or not, no Jew was believed to be a narrow-minded, prejudiced bigot.

Il that notwithstanding, is it possible that those folks who thought that New York's post-WWII, non-objective abstract art was a Jewish thing were correct – at least to some degree? Did the awareness of the horrors of the Holocaust cause some of New York's artists, those with non-religious, but ethnic, American-Jewish backgrounds, to look for ways to express themselves that would disregard the inputs of figurative Western art: its having been derived from the works of the ancestors of the very same Christian peoples who had denied them their humanity? Perhaps. After all, many, if not most of the more prominent artists in the New York School were ethnic Jews – and none of the adherents of either of the Semitic religions: Judaism or Mohammedanism, were known to have been directly or indirectly involved in the making of Europe's early, realistic, rooted-in-Christianity art. (Though it's possible that finding a non-Christianity-based approach to the making of art could have been their motivation, it should be noted that the overwhelming majority of the early major, anti-academic and non-objective painters had Christian antecedents.)

All this notwithstanding, since non-objective, abstract, expressionist art was being purchased by ethnic Christians along with ethnic Jews and others, can there really be any reason to connect the introduction and popularizing, in America, of non-representational art – with a Semitic-based taboo banning the depiction of the figure? And, did this prohibition result in the superannuating (albeit-temporarily) of figurative Academic Art? And, did this, in turn, bring about the reactionary extolling of Academic Art by the likes of a Tom Wolfe?

*

Anyone familiar with the overwrought bombastic writing of the ever-trying-to-shock, Tom Wolfe (the white-suited, wily

defender of the hackneyed and destroyer of the devil's doings: the avant-garde) – would not be surprised by his ignorance-based, wholesale support of figurative Academic Art. Nor would they be surprised to see him in attendance at the opening, at a major just-off-Madison Avenue gallery, of an exhibition of well-painted, well-drawn, well-framed excellent imitations of Europe's outpouring of nineteenth-century Salon paintings: at best, pleasant, innocuous, passable imitations of the works of those truly great masters of the romantic-mundane-made-exotic: Bouguereau, Cabanel and Gerome. At worst, the works on view at the gallery were hackneyed academic inanities.

It must be noted, that in the early 1970's, many figurative artists (few of whose works were academic), feeling marginalized by the decades-long, intellectualized touting of non-objective contemporary art as the only work that could be considered fine art, were well pleased to read Wolfe's damning of the works by the New York School's logo painters of the 1950's and 60's. (It should also be noted, that many of his supporters were ethnic Jews)



With the notable exception of the miniatures that were painted with the patronage of India's less-than-fanatic, Moslem, Persian-Mogul Emperors, all aspects of the making and displaying of figurative representations of living beings (human or otherwise) were and still are a no-no for compliant, not-necessarily-Fundamentalist Moslems. Nevertheless, despite their limitations as to subject matter, Moslems have excelled in the making of things of extraordinary beauty: most notably in their buildings. And, both the designing of the interiors and exteriors were directly affected by their religious beliefs – this, whether or not they were of an explicitly religious nature.

Just about every known civilization had created its own religion-based art, and just about all, in one way or another have influenced America's art-based ethos. This, mainly by way of post-Renaissance, Christian Europeans – whose skills and knowledge of art, had been acquired as a result of an amalgamation of its own once-fairly-primitive abilities and concepts with those absorbed from Byzantium and non-Germano-Slavic cultures (much of which reached Europe by way of Mohammedan scientists and intellectuals – as did much of that coming from Europe's own ancient Mediterranean civilizations).

As a result of the American hegemony, America's political- and marketing-based considerations for defining fine art – as well as the not-so-fine arts – are being publicized and absorbed by folks worldwide. And, America's influence in these matters (as well as in many other less aesthetic fields) are either being enthusiastically embraced by those who are now considered the good guys or vigorously rejected by those now being called the bad guys.



The motivation for the Church's construction of awe-inspiring, soaring-skyward-up-to-Heaven cathedrals was intended for the glorification of the Christian concept of God, and were accomplished as an expression of an unquestioned belief in that God by the folks building them. No doubt, the Church sponsored that construction as a means of maintaining the oneness of the concept of Christ's Resurrection with that of all good Christians. An unintended result of all this was that it advanced the West's ability to build treasured skyscrapers – the downside being that it contributed to the greed-motivated destruction of New York's Penn Station.

Coincident to the making of the world's great cathedrals,

the Roman Catholic Church, as a means of making universal the melodies associated with the approved words praising their Lord, instigated the making of easy-to-read notations – all of which was to eventually allow for the composing of the West’s magnificent, complex classical music: symphonies, operas and such – as well as the martial music that sends men off to fight a war of aggression.

Meanwhile, gradually, in the aftermath of Eastern Catholicism’s bout with iconoclasm, support for the making of figurative art, which was to be used as an educational tool – to tell the story of Christianity to Europe’s illiterate masses – was to initiate the making of the works of the great Renaissance artists. And this, in turn, was to lead up to the making of the West’s monumental works in the graphic and plastic arts. (as well as the inanities of much of what is now being called Contemporary Art).

Without going into the written word, one need only mention the influence of Dante’s *Inferno*, Saint Augustine’s *Confessions* and the King James version of the Bible to illustrate the impact that Christianity had on Western literature and poetry (which also allowed for the publication of the Christian-born Hitler’s *Mein Kampf*).

All of which supports the writer’s contention that, despite his own devotion to Atheism, religious fervor and the dedication to God(s) were major motivators for the making of great and inspirational art – no matter what the medium or manner of its expression. Nevertheless, an intended good, can’t guarantee universally admired results.

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So, we see that all the major fine arts that were to become the basis for the world culture that has come to us by way of Europe had been nurtured by the pre-Renaissance fathers of the Universal Church. And, when those fine arts peaked,

they were then, over time, spread worldwide – often with the blessing of the advocates of high-church Christianity. Nevertheless, as an Atheist, the writer feels compelled to note that some of the most horrible aspects of world culture have also been nurtured by those very same folks.

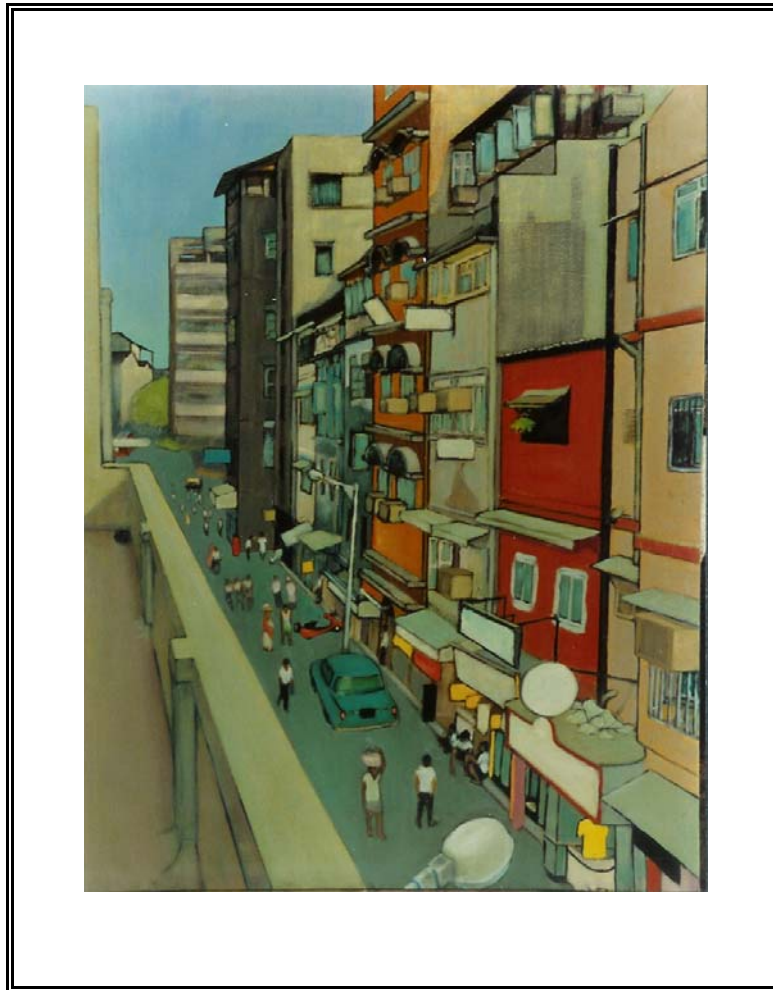
Along with an Armageddon-rationalized, good vs. evil use of weapons of mass destruction, the Old Testament's acceptance of race-based slavery and colonialism has been and is still being used, primarily by Western nations, to make moral, and therefore acceptable, some of mankind's more-despicable, greed-motivated doings.

[It's the stress on riches, along with pressures resulting from a Moslem-cum-Jewish-cum-Protestant, literal reading of the Decalogue – with its prohibitions relating to graven images – that has detracted from the ability of artists to express an ego-satisfying, self-determined manifestation of their talent.]

The pursuit of wealth has overtaken that of a quest for a spiritual life. Greed, not Atheism, is the true enemy of the fine arts, as well as of those religions which stress goodness and express compassion for the poor.

All of which should cause one to think twice before accepting the assertions of righteousness and benevolence made by Bible-thumping politicians whose actions belie their contentions that they're acting in accordance with the wishes of a merciful God. It's impossible to find any evidence of an admirable, Godliness in the actions by born-again folks who claim to be Compassionate Conservatives – or in the activities of those greed-motivated folks who claim they have God's authorization for the taking of Promised Lands – which are occupied by other folks.

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Mumbai - Mid-1990's (oil)

VI

INTERVIEW IN INDIA

Part One

The writer, SKUNK

Interviews

The artist, Nainsink Tagore

The subject is: Contemporary Indian Art

SKUNK: "It is my understanding that during the past twelve years plus, you've spent well over three years in India – at which time you've been to a hell of a lot of the country's major art centers."

Nainsink Tagore: "That's so. I always try to visit as many museums, galleries and art schools as possible – whenever and wherever I travel. And, along the way, I try to take in temples, mosques, churches and historical monuments and sites."

SK: "Would I be correct in assuming that that includes many of those artist communities and schools scattered around India."

NT: "Yes. But, I'm a New Yorker, and since Mumbai is the most cosmopolitan city in India, I've spent more time there,

than anywhere else in the country. I did, however, make a point of taking in as much of India as possible. As a result, I've been to art-centered areas in and around New Delhi, Tagore's Shantiniketan, Vadodara, Chennai, Kolkata, Bangalore and Hyderabad – as well as Mumbai. In addition, I've been to such must-tourist-stops as: Aurangabad, Ajanta, Ellora, Khajuraho, Jaipur, Fatehpur Sikri, Mount Abu, the Taj Mahal, Konark, Varanasi and Buddha's Saranath. Moreover, since I've made no attempt to validate my knowledge of India and Indian art by acquiring a list of degrees issued by universities staffed with a body of scholarly academicians schooled in the West's time-worn, Euro-centric, Old Testament-rationalized-colonialism view of Asian art: one that's intended to belittle the aesthetic influences of the peoples of South Asia on the world at large, it's probably a good idea that I also mention some of those archaeological, cultural and religious centers that I've been to – such as: Lothal, Haridwar, Rishikesh, the Gandhi ashram and step-wells in Ahmedabad — as well as Madurai and many of the other major temple cities of South India.

"I might add that I've been to a few of those now-Indo-Raj, former-Anglo-Raj clubs; a cantonment and hill station – which, when added to the Victorian-era paintings found in India's Raj-era museums (for the most part embarrassing collections of second-rate, nineteenth-century academic works) and Empire-influenced buildings that one finds strewn throughout India's former Raj-controlled major cities (and which, for the most part consist of a mishmash of banal and incongruous combinations of unrelated styles of monumental architecture – which could only be compared to Italy's horrendous, Mussolini-era, neo-Roman Empire structures), enables me to get some idea of the effect the British have had, for better or worse, on India's Contemporary Art."

SK: "All of which, plus the fact that I know you to be an accomplished artist, one who has traveled widely both in and out of India (half a dozen European countries, and throughout America), where, I understand, you've also taken every opportunity to visit museums and galleries, is the reason why, despite, or perhaps I should say because of your non-academic background, that I thought it a good idea to get your views on contemporary Indian art."

NT: "I'm honored by your invitation. But, I don't want to give the impression that all academic learning is bad. That part of it which gives students a body of relatively-impartial knowledge and teaches them the techniques necessary to develop the skills required to function in their chosen fields, is certainly beneficial. However, it's when grades (all too often based on tests that require a parochial and biased interpretation of the subject at hand – one validating that of the instructor and the status quo) become more important than opening up the minds of students to an understanding of the whys and what-fors of life and the world in general, as well as that of their particular field (which in this case is the making of original works of art) – that I find fault with the teaching that goes on in university circles.

"Degree-granting universities, not having the ability or, it seems, the desire to impart the skills required to be an artist, go about teaching their students how to verbally rationalize, in an artsy manner, the evidence of their incompetence. And, sad to say, this has not only adversely affected the caliber of the plastic and graphic arts being taught and acquired in academia, but due to its ready adoption worldwide by the promoters of the Politically Correct, it's undermining the very concept of excellence in art. One need only look at the exhibitions held in Contemporary Art museums and pay-to-hang galleries, to realize how destructive the concept is – which is that everyone's an artist, and everything is art.

"Intensifying the harmful effect of that catering to the demands of the politically correct, is the long-practiced selection-by-hyphenation – which the advocates of the politically correct, due to its absorption of the nonsensical rationale associated with contemporary so-called art (with its total lack of any credible criteria) have readily adopted. In addition, with no standards to go by, art collectors might just as well buy the work of a fellow-hyphenate: those included in the same race, religion, ethnicity, sexual orientation, economic status or you name it.

"Though often self-imposed, compliance by galleries, museums and wannabe-fair individuals with the requirements of the Politically Correct ends up having a most destructive influence on future wannabe artists. Forced to prove their PC credentials, works by those folks from within a PC grouping are ostentatiously exhibited by museums and galleries – and art critics who, fearful of being considered bigots, tout the excellence of the creations (or, at the very least, gloss over their failings) – usually with little or no regard for their intrinsic worth as fine art. This brings about a chain reaction: since the works are exhibited in galleries and museums – and commercial organizations and well-meaning individuals, in order to prove their PC credentials, then go about purchasing and displaying the often questionable works – it ends up elevating those manifestations of all that often-hypocritical do-goodism to the level of museum-quality fine art.

"So, it's bad enough, that there are few, if any art-based criteria for works falling within the realm of the politically correct; but, when added to the fact that this, at-best, modest work attains the prestigious stature of museum-quality art (admittedly a now-dubious designation), it becomes a catastrophe. By setting the standards for contemporary American art, this modest work will, most

certainly, influence the young wannabe-artist; art-supporting foundations and potential art buyers – all of which have the cumulative effect that will, most assuredly, spell ruin for the plastic and graphic arts. Why? One might ask. And the answer is that the PC-artists' often-mediocre (and, almost never excellent) work, due to its museum exposure and critical acclaim, not only influences contemporary artists, but future generations of wannabes, as well."

SK: "It seems to me that you're faulting the same combination of favoritism, money and politics for the sorry state of Contemporary Art that artists have always blamed. Yet, there are many who blame the most influential artist of the first half of the twentieth century, Picasso, for the absence of any standards for the making of Contemporary Art. He's been cited as saying that the freedom associated with the daubings by children is the ideal for all artists."

NT: "I can see where they're coming from. But unless we believe that Picasso was to be taken literally – in that the correlation between the hand and eye is irrelevant and an awareness of a color's diversity of effects (and how to utilize them), along with that knowledge of the physical makeup of the human body and the workings of the mind (with all that information which has been gained by mankind over the eons) is extraneous, what he meant is that an artist should not consider the academic inputs and skills that he had long since acquired (and which should have become part of his subconscious), when involved in the creative process. And, that makes complete sense to any intelligent artist or knowledgeable layman. However, if that's not what he meant, I'd say that Picasso was doing what many of his detractors have long claimed – and that's pulling the public's leg."

SK: "I think we may be getting far afield. I should never have mentioned Picasso. It seems that whenever his name is brought up, due to his domination (as an artist) during the first half of the twentieth century, talk of him seems to take precedence over everything else. Perhaps it would be a good idea if we zeroed in on what this interview is supposed to be about – contemporary India art."

NT: "Okay. But, I'm glad you admitted that you started it. Now, getting back to the subject at hand, and as you know from our earlier conversations I've been doing a lot of thinking about India's current art scene (which, of course, is one of the reasons for this interview). So, I've jotted down some of my ideas on the subject. And, I think it might be a good idea for me to introduce what I've written so far – and then, if you like, you can take me to task."

SK: "That's fine by me. Tell me when you think it's appropriate, and I'll just add it to this interview. Is that okay with you?"

NT: "That's fine by me. But, because I believe the problem is worldwide, I must state in advance that when discussing the negative inputs affecting contemporary Indian art, and there are many, it doesn't mean that the peoples of other nations don't have their own deterrents preventing them from making meaningful contemporary fine art."

SK: "That's understood. And, I'm sure your comments, negative or not, will be of a constructive nature."

NT: "Sure, but I feel strongly about the negative inputs to India's current art scene. Though, it's quite possible that some of what I find fault with in India's Contemporary Art has a great significance for the Indian artist – after all, my being an American, born and bred (albeit with an Indian-born, Kshatrya father), I'll probably end up equating some

of the pros and cons of India's Contemporary Art with those in America. However, I doubt that that should make much of a difference. The creating of truly great art in India and by Indians goes back a long way – so, there's no legitimate excuse for the lack of that all-important combination of great skill and true genius that's now manifested in so much of what passes for contemporary Indian art.

"Although educated-in-English, Indian artists can't help but be influenced by Western art, they should also be made aware of the fact that the quality of the paintings found at Ajanta wasn't matched in Europe until the Renaissance. And the skills and creative genius that produced the magnificent Kailash temple in Elora, the ancient emotion-laden carvings in Khajuraho or the graceful wood and marble carvings at Mount Abu (to name but a few) have yet to be matched by Western artists. Though one sees signs that genius is still present in some works of India's contemporary art, and there is definite proof of excellent skill in other works, it's rare, indeed, to see evidence that the two have been combined. And, therein lies one of the basic faults that I find with India's Contemporary Art."

SK: "I realize full well that you'll be looking at contemporary India art from a Western point of view (albeit, I trust, an unprejudiced one) – and I couldn't expect anything else. So let's hear it."

NT: "Okay, here goes: America's still-prevalent platitude regarding Contemporary Art (sad to say, it's one that's in the process of being accepted worldwide, and is affecting the work of all-too-many Indian artists, both here and in America) is that everything's art and everyone's an artist. The result, of which, is that art has no parameters, and lacks an identifiable definition (other than the ethnicity and such of the artist), therefore, some would say that art, at least as we've come to know it, can no longer exist."

"In America, the inanity: that everyone's an artist, is used by one or the other politically-powerful, claiming-to-be-a-minority group whose members expect special consideration as a means of making up for purported past discrimination. And, although the intent of this catering to the Politically Correct may be of a laudatory nature, it brings into play one of its most destructive influences when applied to the making of any of the fine arts. For, in addition to resulting in an unfair form of reverse discrimination – the standards are almost always lowered. Others, who might very well be more capable of advancing the arts (for all humanity's benefit) and therefore be more deserving of the benefits of recognition, are all-too-often deprived of the opportunity to do so.

"The work itself no longer matters; but rather, the fame of the maker or the grouping to which he or she belongs is what counts. And, it's the politically connected artist from within the group, whose work gets selected for exposure and has the best chance of being purchased (which adds economic support to the usually less-competent artist). Mind you, it's almost never the politically-connected artist, from within the group, who's the most worthy of such preferential treatment. Moreover, as often as not, the work of even the most worthy from within the group is rarely, if ever, the most deserving of special consideration."



**[Insert of Nainsink Tagore's article on
contemporary Indian art]**

The effects of: economic considerations; residual Victorian attitudes; adjusting to the changing concepts of art as determined by the West's claiming-to-be-avant garde, critical authorities; the caste system; the restrictions on subject matter imposed by one or the other of India's many prominent religions and political factions - along with the rejection of India's ancient past: both artistic and historic - all work to adversely influence India's modern-day artists. And, this, in turn, prevents them from creating a meaningful contemporary Indian art.

Economics - In India, unless an artist has sure-to-sell work (which is rare), or has work accepted for exhibition by a publicity-seeking corporation - gallery space must be purchased. And, who could afford to buy that space - surely not experimental artists - unless they also happen to belong to the nation's rich, and upper middle classes. Now, although the West's relatively-economically-secure middle-classes tend to supply the bulk of the world's avant-garde artists, this doesn't hold true in India - where creativity must take second place to practical money-based interests. Few, if any, amongst India's aforementioned secure middle-class are willing to, or capable of expending the physical, as well as the mental energy required to create evocative works of art: those capable of exuding a sense of the truly magical. And, as already noted, Indians not socially or economically secure, cannot afford the luxury of producing art for art's sake. Instead, they must settle for the producing of tried-and-true, sure-to-sell, inconsequential works - works that rarely earn the right to be called art, let alone fine art.

Residual Victorian Attitudes - Much of the teaching of art in India is still based on that of nineteenth-century British academies (which holds true for America, as well). And, for the Indian academic artist, this not only results in his or her acquiring a stilted, lifeless how-to, method of portraying the world in general, but also carries a hypocritical, negative attitude towards the human figure (drawing only from the antique: casts of nude Greek statues, or from very old and chubby lady models) as well as towards all implications of mankind's sexuality (which results in only child-like, snicker-sex renderings being acceptable).

In addition, the influence of current Hindu and Moslem religious prohibitions as well as those of self-righteous Christian missionaries - plus a continuing undercurrent of early Buddhist teachings which stress the spiritual needs of mankind (while not allowing for the artist to have a perfectly normal and healthy appreciation for the human body), all work to impede the ability of Indian artists to put their innermost, unrestrained emotions into their work. Moreover, this restraint has affected every aspect of their work - whether or not it deals with an interplay of the human experience.

Those shortcomings associated with a Victorian sensibility, have not only affected India's present-day artists (causing them to either follow or oppose it), but only a very few British, as well as a somewhat larger number of American painters, have managed to escape its negative impact. So, it would be expecting an awful lot of Indian painters, who, until relatively recently were kept unaware of their own long-forgotten artistic tradition, and who received their first taste of Western art during the reign of that prudish lady, for them not to continue to be affected by the hypocritical societal inputs of that era.

[It's been pointed out to the writer that in the not-so-distant past, there had been talk of demolishing the

temples in Khajuraho - or, at the very least, plastering over the glorious sculptures that adorn them.]

In opposition to those producers of almost-always-lifeless, British-influenced academic renderings, are wannabe artists who go about intellectually rationalizing the evidence of their incompetence - by claiming that their work fits into that American-influenced, catch-all category: Contemporary Art. The result is that they too claim that everything is art, and that everyone producing it is an artist. And, so, the makers of the ever-so sophisticated Contemporary Art, whether or not they're university-trained, with few exceptions, have not made the effort to master the skills required to manifest their genius in their work.

Until Indian artists seek and develop their own sense of the aesthetic, and stop adopting the West's much publicized rationales for hackneyed, meaningless daubings as a means of rationalizing their own skill-based shortcomings, with few exceptions, I can't see them being anything better than very good makers of imitations of trivial contemporary American cum Western art. And, the ubiquitous renderings of stylized Ganeshas, of one sort or another, are not the answer.

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Recently, I attended a symposium on: writing about art. It was held at the Little Theatre, one of the buildings that make up the superb NCPA cultural center in Mumbai. There were six speakers sitting at a table on stage - and all had their say. Every one of them spoke of art as if it were a specific knowable, and therefore definable thing. Yet, the only definition given by any of them seemed to be that art (later clarified to mean: Contemporary Art) could only exist if and when interpreted by one of them: a guru of art, aka - an art critic. If not for the fact that the artists who produce the gibberish that passes for fine art

these days lack the ability to make an aesthetically-meaningful, graphic statement, one would find the critic's self-serving assertion ludicrous. However, without its being authenticated as fine art by an influential critic (and all critics are deemed influential), the overwhelming majority of Contemporary Art would be laughed away as self-indulgent and tasteless nonsense.

[That a relative handful of now-lauded, avant-garde works from a bygone era had also been derided for being self-indulgent and tasteless nonsense, is hardly justification for the outpouring of a plethora of contemporary meaningless daubings and constructions that are currently claiming aesthetic merit by alleging it's avant-garde art.]

A music critic was quoted as saying that he thought it easier to write about music than the visual arts. Why? Because, concertgoers are knowledgeable about music, and therefore he was not required to teach them how to listen to a piece. On the other hand, he claimed that art critics were required to teach their readers how to look at works of art. What colossal, self-serving nonsense!

One needn't know a damn thing about counterpoint or notation or chords or how to play an instrument or what differentiates a single-reed from a double-reed instrument or whatever -- in order to listen to and enjoy music. At most, all a concertgoer requires, is a quick scanning of the program notes before opening his or her ears; music itself is a universal language: no doubt, it's because music is in tune with that pulse that all humanity has in common. Every people, the world over, practice or listen to some form of music. However, people, worldwide, also create or observe one or another form of the plastic arts (as they do dance -- but that's another story). It doesn't require a viewer to listen to a lecture by an expert on Paleolithic art

explaining stone-age paintings in order to grasp the magic derived from their beauty of color and form -- and skillful execution.

All any viewer need do to appreciate a piece created as a work of art, by an artist (and it's the true artist, not the MFA degree-bearing critic who makes that determination), is to open his or her eyes to a mind that's receptive. No words are needed - and if a work requires words (other than, at most, its title) to give it meaning, then it's a failure as a visual statement - and undeserving of the term fine art.

It's doubtful that there is even one credible music critic who is not proficient in the playing of at least one instrument. Yet, it's the honest art critic who admits that he or she became a critic as a result of being a failed artist: one who was unable to master the skills, or have the genius, required to make meaningful art (or was a non-artist, hack reporter assigned the task by the editor).

Sports writers are known to be non-athletes who have taken up their profession for their love of sports; as an assignment - or due to their having a desire to best those who are athletes: by writing about them - usually critically (and, if this leads the reader to make a parallel with the motivations of some art critics - so be it). But, since most sports have meaningful statistics, and even allowing for the fact that they don't tell the whole story of an athlete's merit, they prevent the sportswriter from being the sole arbiter of his or her worth. Not so the art critic. Since there are no criteria for judging Contemporary Art: the art critic, that verbose, failed artist or journeyman reporter on assignment who has a column in an art magazine or newspaper, becomes the sole determiner of just what is and what isn't art. And, so we see, that the tattered tail on the dog's behind ends up wagging the dog.

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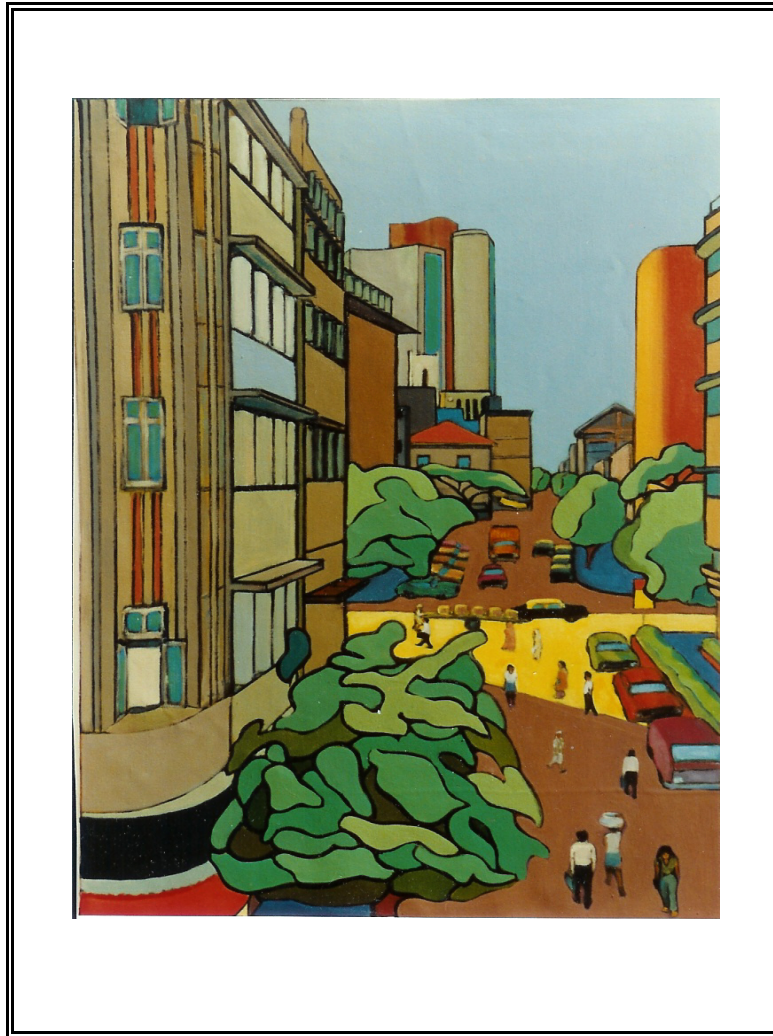
SKUNK (after reading the inserted article): "Wow! I'm sure glad that I'm not an art critic."

Nainsink Tagore: "I guess my article on *Contemporary Indian Art* sounds as if I'm blaming art critics for the decline of the plastic arts. But it's not their fault. They're functioning in the same greed-motivated world as the artist. No doubt, the motivations for an artist to dedicate his or her life to the making of art are many and varied. But, very little meaningful art has ever been produced when the sole motivation was the making of money. There's no question in my mind, that if an individual had the ability to be a great artist, and had that person turned his or her interest to the making of money instead of art, then he or she could have been quite successful. But, there are mighty few people (offhand, I have trouble thinking of even one modern-day artist), whose sole motivation for becoming an artist was the potential for making big bucks, and who've turned out to be truly great (not only popular).

"As a consequence, despite my being a confirmed non-believer, I realize that religion (though merely one of the non-money reasons for a dedication to the making of art) has been a motivator for the creation of a goodly portion of the world's great art – so much so, that it almost makes up for its having been responsible for such a huge portion of mankind's misery.

"All things considered, one can only assume that as far as the creation of great art goes, religious fervor is a far better motivator than greed, fame or need."

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Mumbai - Mid-1990's

INTERVIEW IN INDIA

Part Two

[The pre-Christian-era ethno-religious-based art and history of those folks who populated the western end of the Eurasian landmass was as diversified as that of pre-colonialism-era India. However, Indians have, despite the constant influx of hordes of alien peoples, managed to maintain knowledge of both their many millennia-long history and their art. Not so Europeans. Over the latter years of the first millennia of the current era, Christianity gradually spread throughout Europe from its roots in the Fertile Crescent (where for centuries Christianity's iconoclasts had gone about destroying just about every aspect of their pre-Christian-era identity). The result was, that Europe's history and cultural past, whether or not religion-based, became near-non-existent; Christian theologians were given a clean slate on which to establish them anew.

[So, Dark-Age Europeans, having lost their religions, acquired the one assembled by the Greeks; having been denied their histories, they adopted for themselves the one claimed by the Bible's Hebrews; having no unifying government or language, they accepted those that had evolved in Rome; and having lost their ability to make art, they garnered the know-how and visions that had developed in Byzantium — the eventual result of their exposure to it during the crusades. And then, in one way or another, North Europe's people (the major recipients of all this) were to repay the Greeks, Italians, Hebrews and Byzantines – for their having conveyed to them the major inputs to their, the Judeo-Christian West's culture – by attempting to dominate or eradicate them: ethos-wise, when not physically.

[One might ask: Why is this pertinent to the people of India? In reply, one could say that it might very well cause

Indians, along with their fellow Asians, the Chinese, to realize that they're not alone. They too were to have the very same Judeo-Christian Europeans, those who had benefited so much, directly and indirectly from the collective doings of the inhabitants of a diversity of ancient cultures, attempt to obliterate all memory of their cultural beginnings, as well. Nonetheless, even allowing for the fact that India has retained much of her cultural past, Indians must take note that all those other culture-giving peoples, including the Chinese (who have also retained much of their ancient culture), are much further along in recovering from the predatory doings of the various, proselytizing colonizing peoples – than they, Indians.]

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SKUNK: "Well, I think I've gotten more than I bargained for. When I requested an interview with you, I didn't realize just how negative your attitude would be towards today's art scene and the art that's currently being produced. Nevertheless, by your faulting the work of the vast majority of all those calling themselves artists, worldwide, which of course includes those in the West, along with India, I doubt that the majority of present-day Indian artists, so many of whom appear to be trying ever so hard to be in tune with the West, will really be annoyed at finding themselves and their work included in your unsympathetic appraisal."

Nainsink Tagore: "It would be a miracle, indeed, if contemporary Indian artists managed to escape the influence of the West – given the money and fame being bestowed there on the makers of what passes, these days, for fine art."

SK: "That may be so. But, have you considered the possibility that Indian artists have been so overwhelmed by

the greatness of their-own, ancient and pre-colonialism art that they've now taken to either imitate it or look elsewhere for their inspiration?"

NT: "Yes, I have. There's no question that those are possibilities. After all, much of that art hasn't been equaled, let alone surpassed by any artists, anywhere in the world.

"Nevertheless, one must take into account that other peoples were faced with the same problem. Parisian artists of the nineteenth century had an equally daunting artistic heritage, yet they used the more or less traditional skills and knowledge of an artist to create their own original works: by employing a powerful avant-garde vision – which we've come to know as Impressionism. In time, this was to lead to a profusion, worldwide, of newer and even more fascinating manifestations of the genius of highly-skilled and knowledgeable artists (culminating in that catchall category, Modern Art). And, the work created by those Modern-Masters was soon to be compared favorably to that of the great artists of Europe's glorious artistic past.

"Meanwhile, Italian artists (much like those in India), who were active in the latter part of the mid-nineteenth century, were not known to have taken part in the Impressionist movement (possibly due to Italy's and her people's having, at that time, such a lowly collective status amongst the people of Europe's more affluent northern nations). For centuries, in order to retain some sense of pride, Italians (again, much as so many of their modern-day Indian counterparts) dwelt on their people's earlier years of glory – which, for Italians, was when those much-acclaimed great Renaissance and Baroque works of art were being created. Nevertheless, by the early years of the twentieth century, Italian artists (who, much like the Parisians, were well-versed in the traditional skills of their profession) were not only able to take part in the West's Surrealist and Futurist

movements (both of which were powerful avant-garde statements), but were amongst their leaders."

SK: "I can see what you're driving at. And, that's that most of today's college- and academy-trained Indian artists lack that combination of skill and genius which you deem so necessary if one is to make an original artistic statement. As a result, you seem to be implying that the overwhelming majority of contemporary Indian artists are either overly intellectual or hide-bound academicians. But this, you say, seems to be the situation worldwide – with all university-trained artists being as guilty as those in India, of resorting to a cerebral rationalization of the manifestations of their shortcomings. At the same time, you claim that most of those artists who've been taught in how-to academies continue to paint (either for economic reasons or as a hobby) the same old hackneyed paintings: those known to delight the I-know-nothing-about-art-but-I-know-just-what-I-like hoi polloi.

"However, even assuming that you're right, I believe that the negative effects of India's economic shortcomings, along with her people's tradition-bound social mores, make it unfair to compare the accomplishments of Indian artists with those of the affluent West."

[In a world where elephants, chimpanzees and three-year-olds are lauded for their ability to wield a paint-laden brush, and then have the results sold as art, it's no wonder that artists, the world over, feel that skills and intellect are no longer required to make a significant, visual artistic statement.]

NT: "There's much logic to what you say. But, it seems nonsensical to me to think that Indians should expect to be judged on an equal footing with the citizens of far more economically advanced nations when intellectual endeavors

are being considered – yet, by claiming that India is just-a-poor, third-world, emerging nation (despite some two hundred million of her citizens being both middle-class and well educated), expect her artists to be excused if and when their artwork indicates that they're somewhat less than top-notch (or when, as in so many instances, much like their Western counterparts, they appear to be merely self-deluding incompetents). Unless Indian artists wish to be the also-rans of the art world, they must set higher standards for themselves, and not attempt to justify any lack of competence by claiming national poverty or that it's either *Contemporary Art* or an indication of its Indian-ness.

“My point is, that if Indian artists stop making excuses, and instead give it their all, they’ll have as much chance as artists from any culture to produce great works of art.

"The last thing I want to do is unjustly fault artists: whether or not with Indian origins. My intention is to stir them up – and not put them down. There's no question in my mind that the overwhelming majority of all contemporary artists, and that, of course, includes those in India, lack the ability or willingness (if not both) to utilize that combination of their unrestrained physical and mental energies: all of which are required, if one is to discover the new, and thereby go beyond the conventional. That this lack has become a universal failing, can be no excuse for Indians. Why? Because, if Indian artists don't develop and utilize their abilities to the nth degree, they'll never develop an intrinsically individualistic art: one that's relevant to their culture and to their times – let alone one capable of earning a universally-acclaimed stature.

"The West's major, art-producing nations don't have the same need. For better or worse, their people, in recent times, have already created an inherently indigenous fine art. Moreover, by the West's having absorbed both the

wealth and knowledge of the rest of the world, it can now afford to cater to the needs of its neurotic, self-indulgent, well-to-do, middle-class citizenry: those who are currently producing and buying that plethora of inconsequential drivel that passes, these days, for Contemporary Art.

"Perhaps, in imitation of the West, the Indian media make ludicrous claims about India's artists and their work. This is done by comparing the evidence of but modest accomplishments by Indian artists to the seminal works of the past giants of Western art – while ignoring everything about India's own great works: those of a bygone era. All of which indicates either a complete ignorance of, or lack of respect for, the world of the graphic arts and its artists. Nevertheless, it is possible that the media's art critics (few of whom have more than a rudimentary knowledge of the hands-on making of art) have been taken in by the colossal PR conceits spouted by certain of India's self-acclaimed great artists.

"In addition, since it's common practice for Indian artists (namely those who have had vanity exhibitions in America or Europe), to claim to be internationally-known, it's only fitting and proper to compare their work with that being produced in the West. So, it seems to me that it's high time for Indians to take responsibility for the art that they produce, and stop hiding behind the claims of India's poverty, on the one hand, and that Indian art has its own rules, rules that require little or no need for artists to apply themselves, both physically, as well as intellectually, to the making of art."



SKUNK: "What you're saying seems to make good sense, however, for the time being I'd like to take a different approach – one that relates to specific artists. Along those

lines, while flipping past the innumerable channels available on the TV in my hotel room, I came across Bharati DD. Although I was to find it most enlightening on any number of subjects about India and her culture, there was one program in particular, which dealt with the status of Indian art, that most intrigued me. It began with a lengthy introduction by an art historian. And much of what he said paralleled certain aspects of your views dealing with the negative inputs weighing on contemporary Indian artists. The learned art historian concluded by stating that he would, at some future date, be zeroing in on the works of four artists. Right or wrong, I assumed that he considered their inputs to Indian art to be most consequential. Two of the artists mentioned were: Rabindranath Tagore and Amrita Shergil – both of whom had expired a half-century or so back. The other two were senior artists (a term I've come across in India when elderly artists are referred to – a sign of respect for their age – but not necessarily for their work).

"I'm anxious to hear what your thoughts are about the work of all four of these artists – and what you think their influence has been on contemporary Indian art. But, since I'm aware of your reluctance to give a critique of the work by an active artist: it could have an adverse affect on his or her livelihood, I promise to delete the names of the living artists before publishing this interview.

Nainsink Tagore: "That seems fair enough. So, I'll give it a crack. The most famous of those artists whom you've mentioned was the internationally known, once-knighted Rabindranath Tagore: the great poet and an icon of the Indian independence movement – and the darling of both West Bengal and Bangladesh.

"Tagore, as is well-known, had won a well-deserved Nobel Prize for his poetry. And, so, I was much bothered when I saw the poorly executed watercolors on view at the

Museum of Modern Art in New Delhi. By no stretch of the imagination did the highfalutin titles enhance the poorly rendered, doodle-like work hanging on the museum's otherwise near-pristine walls. Again, a few years later, when I visited Shantiniketan, I couldn't understand why such prominence was being given to his graphic renderings. Tagore was one of India's great men; but, by his adoring supporters' championing him as a great visual artist, they do his memory a disservice. Their good intentions merely work to detract from his greatness.

"All that notwithstanding, Tagore, as a visual artist, can still be considered as having had a major impact on one aspect of the direction that Indian art was to take. And, that had to do with his admirable attempt to free Indian artists from the need to imitate the emotionally-dead, how-to manner of painting associated with the stultifying academic works so admired by the British Raj, and India's then-Anglophile sophisticates.

"Not so praiseworthy, however, was the byproduct of Tagore's adorers' misplaced acclaim of his art (which one assumes, being the great man he was, would have been against his wishes). And, that is the very real destructive influence (that of a near-total disregard for the skills required to be an artist) which his poor renderings continue to have on the mind-set of many of India's makers of Contemporary Art (which goes hand in hand with the current fad, so popular in America, that claims everyone's an artist, and everything's art). Perhaps it was because writing had come so naturally to the genius, Tagore, that he believed himself capable of making a meaningful graphic statement without expending the time and energy necessary to learn the language of art. Another possibility (one I find almost impossible to believe), is that he had so low an opinion of the graphic arts, that he believed all he had to do was daub some color on a piece of paper and give it a title,

in order to make a significant, philosophical artistic statement."

SK: "One down and three to go. And, although I'm sure that what you've just said will prove to be controversial, I'd still like to hear your opinion of Amrita Shergil, a much respected woman artist who died in 1941, when still in her twenties. She was one of the, if not the only woman artist, who was active during India's pre-independence era."

NT: "Amrita Shergil is quite another story. Although, until recently, the only work of hers that I'd seen in color was in a book, after seeing an exhibition of her work, it was evident, that she was a professionally-competent artist, whose work appeared to be acceptable, impressionism-influenced realism. And, although French impressionism did affect Indian artists, it doesn't appear to have come by way of Amrita Shergil. So, one can safely say that her work had little or no influence on her contemporaries, in or out of India. And, though the unconventional manner in which she led her personal life gave her a certain amount of notoriety, even her lifestyle appears to have had little or no effect on the way Indian women, artists or not, led or lead their lives. One would have to come to the conclusion that the main reason the very attractive and talented lady was included is that the moderator wished to be Politically Correct. It's either that, or else she was the second best of India's pre-independence artists – a conclusion that I find nonsensical."

SK: "Okay. So much for her, now I'd like to hear what you have to say about the living artists with Indian origins who were selected to be showcased on Bharati DD. I hope you don't end up being negative about all four of them. As agreed, their names will not be mentioned. Instead, let's refer to them as the first or second senior artist selected by the moderator to be showcased. So, tell me, what is your opinion of the first of those living artists selected, and of

his work? But first, I should mention that it is widely accepted that he's a self-promoter of the first magnitude, and as a consequence, is nationally (in India) known."

NT: "I see in his work evidence of his being a perfectly competent draftsman: one with a flare for the dramatic – and, due to his technical skills, which appear to be more than adequate, he has every right to tout himself as an artist of the first order. Nevertheless, his work smacks of commercial advertising: with him being the product touted. One can find any number of artists in the West producing work of a similar stature – often at prices far less than those being paid by his loyal following. One might go to any of the Greenwich Village Art Exhibit look-alikes (found in shopping malls and such spread out throughout the States) to find one or more works of a similar commercial-type. The best I could say about this gentleman is that he's a good artist with the cheek of an Andy Warhol, but without his ground-breaking genius. One need only consider his Mother Teresa paintings, which are nothing more than attempts to cash in on the religiosity of India's unsophisticated Catholic population, to realize the shallowness of his art.

"In summation, art-wise, he appears to have influenced no one, in or out of India. But, he may very well have an influence on the PR tactics of some young, and some not so young, Indian artists."

SK: "Okay. So much for that gentleman. So, let's hear about the second of those senior artists with Indian origins who've been selected for showcasing on Bharati DD."

NT: "From what I've seen of his work, he appears to be a more or less competent artist. But his crudely painted (perhaps deliberately), sneaky-lewd, black-line on white-background work seems to indicate that he's determined, despite his advanced age, to PR himself as a perennial enfant terrible. This has obviously had its desired affect on

certain wannabe-titillated-by-a-prodigy buyers – as well as the presenters of TV's cultural programs.

"In summary, I find that of the four artists selected, only Tagore has had an affect on Indian art. And, if Indian artists were to keep Tagore's baby: the (unrestricted) search for India's very-own inherent artistic persona, and throw out the bath water (the idea that technical skills were superfluous), the effect of Tagore's artwork could be exemplary."

SK: "So much for your ideas about the influence of those four artists on modern-day Indian Art. However, what I find interesting is that amongst the four artists selected only Tagore is a Hindu. Is it possible that DD, the government run TV station wanted to be truly politically correct – and have one Christian, one Moslem and one Sikh, as well as Tagore in order to be truly politically correct or does the fact that they were selected signify something far deeper?"

NT: "Although I was aware of their religions, I know that I wasn't, at least consciously, taking that into consideration when discussing them. But your question does give a lot of food for thought. Religion could very well have been the reason for their having been selected – but, in addition to religion, money matters may have also played a part in the whys and wherefores of their painting the way they did. Active during the Raj era, both Rabindranath Tagore and Amrita Shergil were financially well off. Tagore came from a wealthy prominent Bengali family – steeped in their privileged Hindu tradition. – and reacted against the overbearing intrusion of Western values. Conversely, Amrita Shergil came from a well-to-do Sikh family. And, Sikhs, for the most part, gained in stature under the Raj – ergo, her wholehearted acceptance of the West's concept of the making of art (albeit, by applying them to Indian themes).

As to the two living artists (one has died since this interview was originally written up), they came from lower-to middle-class backgrounds: one Moslem and the other a Christian who was slightly better off. The Christian, like the Sikh Shergil, spent formative years in the West; but his works were commercial products – and had little if any Indian quality. The Moslem, a figurative artist, (and therefore not a Fundamentalist) gained his experience as a billboard painter and as a result, he showed at least some Indian influence – albeit, that of India’s flamboyant, exaggerated movie posters.”



SKUNK: "Recently, I watched another Bharati DD program; it related to much of what we've discussed regarding Indian art. And, so, I'd like to hear your views on what was covered. The program was in three parts: the first of which dealt with the selling of art; the second covered a critical review of an exhibition that took place in Bangalore; and, in the third, comments were made by a few of the artists who had been asked to do postcard-size paintings intended to celebrate the one hundred and twenty-fifth anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi's birth.

"In the segment that dealt with the selling of artworks, nothing at all was said about a price to worth ratio. Though I'm reluctant to bring up Picasso again, since I think he's responsible for equating the size of his paintings to their price, I must. His or his dealers' contention was that, whatever he did was of equal value, consequently, only the size of a painting by Picasso could determine its price."

Nainsink Tagore: "On Picasso's part, it may have been a conceit, or it may have been a means for his art dealers to sell to a wider range of potential art buyers: those with various sized bank accounts or with varying opinions as to the worth of his oeuvre. However, in general, I'd say that

this stress on price and collecting for profit is merely a byproduct of today's assertion that everything is art and everyone's an artist (which, granted, Picasso, facetiously or not, may have had a hand in bringing about). The result is that a majority of today's art buyers are no different than the proverbial fool who knows the price of everything and the value of nothing."

SK: "So, what you seem to be saying is that, in Picasso's case, there may very well be some logic to the pricing (after all, few people are capable of comprehending the magnitude of his works' artistic value – and only know that it's quite expensive and could be a good investment). But, for artworks in general, there being no criteria, and since art is almost always a luxury purchase, its value is whatever someone (a fool?) will pay.

"Now, let's tackle the second segment. Here, a critic spoke with great enthusiasm about the exhibition on view – as if she really knew what she was talking about. And, maybe she did – because she spoke with great authority. However, she didn't seem to know a damn thing about art. But what was apparent, was that this critic, much like all-too-many art critics (who, you've stated, can be found in abundance, worldwide), regardless of their sex, knew little about the how-to of the making of art. And, that may very-well be the reason why she was interpreting the paintings on view, as if she were responding to her shrink's queries on what she saw in the inkblots of a Rorschach test.

"Since I cannot recall one word being mentioned about the structure and design of the works on view, this seems to confirm your worst scenario for the state of Indian art. As if that wasn't bad enough, the critic was to ramble on with a display of such verbosity, that one couldn't help but assume that she was being paid by the word – much like those skillful newspaper reporters who, irrespective of their

knowledge, can write an article with the requisite number of words and on any given assigned subject.

[Though not limited to India, newspapers, as a rule, pay art critics little or nothing. The result is, that many self-appointed experts expect, when not demand, a payoff from either the artist or gallery for a favorable review.]

“Adding insult to injury, for all her pretentious blather, there was never any mention of the ability of the artist to manifest a meaningful visual statement: one, as you so adamantly claim, must be capable of emitting a sense of the magical – which, though I hadn't thought about it before, I now realize how right you were in stressing the need to have a sense of the magical in a work of art. And, in looking back, I now realize that I've always reacted favorably to those works that filled me with a sense of wonderment.”

NT: "Along those lines, I must admit that I have, though only on rare occasions, felt that the magic of a banal painting on black velvet, of a well-drawn dewdrop glistening on a bright-red apple, is preferable to the incompetently-drawn, self-indulgent, rationalized inanities that pass for Contemporary Art these days. However, I must also admit that that emotion only comes over me when I come face to face with some of the very worst of those pretentious works created by today's look-ma-no-talent geniuses."

SK: "After seeing such a profusion of inconsequential daubing being passed off as fine art, your decrying the current state of the arts has me agreeing with you ever so much. But, I think, as an artist, the third part of the program, which covered artists who had been asked to donate postcard-size paintings intended to celebrate the one hundred and twenty-fifth anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi's birth, might bother you even more."

NT: "Maybe, but only if the artists received no pay for their work – which would just be another indication of the lack of respect (in most nations, worldwide) that artists receive these days. Worldwide, artists are asked to donate their art for sale: for the benefit of one or another charity. Sometimes, the artist receives a percentage of the selling price or a tax break – but more often than not the artist receives nothing. All of which does cause many of the best artists to refuse the honor and, in their place, it's almost always the ambitious, wannabe somebody who willingly donates his or her work: being only too glad to get the publicity that goes with being considered a real artist. Meanwhile, the artist gets stiffed, and the officers and staff of the charity, as well as the guards and floor sweepers, always get paid for their labor."

SK: "No pun intended, but you paint a dismal picture of the state of both Academic and Contemporary Art, as well as the potential for artists to earn a living from the making of fine art. Whether or not that's a worldwide phenomenon, if you're right, Indian artists must surely be troubled by your conclusions."

NT: "And well they should be. For, if they are, that's the first step. Surely they must stop accepting themselves as second best to the West. Although not having the killer instinct (which I, personally, find a good thing) may be acceptable as a means of rationalizing India's shortcomings in competitive endeavors, I can think of no excuse for Indian artists refusing to put in the effort, both physical and mental, that would enable them to create a truly meaningful fine art."

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Mumbai - Mid-1990's (oil)

INTERVIEW IN INDIA Part Three

SKUNK: “In the second part of this interview you were quite negative about the potential for artists to earn a living from the making of fine art, whether it’s academic or contemporary. From what you’ve said, as well as from my own observations, this is a universal problem: one that all artists must cope with. The question that comes to mind is: In this materialism-based, greed-inspired era, do you think it’s possible for a money-backed appreciation of the fine arts (solely for a work’s aesthetic value) to exist?”

Nainsink Tagore: “I guess I should heed the implied warning of the old saw: Fools go in where wise men fear to tread. Nevertheless, in answer to your question, I’ll hazard a qualified guess.

“There’s no doubt that we’re living in a world with a consumer-oriented economy: where every nation’s economic well-being is dependent on the spending habits of its own citizens – as well as those of innumerable other countries, whether or not more prosperous. And, I don’t think anyone will contest the fact that the majority of all those folks with sufficient money to buy art tend to be an unsophisticated lot. So, when they’re faced with the kind of questionable nonsense about art that’s batted around on TV and in the press – either by self-promoting artists, or by art critics (in the employ of newspapers, artists or galleries), it’s no wonder that they’re reluctant to pay good money for any art (fine, or otherwise). They just don’t have any idea of just how to determine a work’s worth – other than that which it’s touted to be – by obviously self-serving experts.

“What’s needed is some kind of standard (albeit, one that doesn’t infringe on the artist’s freedom to create a personal

vision) for delineating just what fine art is. Lacking logical and reliable criteria and exacerbated by the continuing pooh-poohing (notably by the artsy, wannabe haut monde) of any consideration, whatsoever, for the acceptance of some sort of a flexible, yet universal yardstick for determining the parameters within which a work must fall (in order for it to be given consideration as fine art), I can see no way for a realistic value to be given to any artwork that is based solely on its aesthetic worth.”

SK: “Perhaps, due to all that verbalized hokum (now so universally employed by the MFA crowd and the advocates of the Politically Correct) used to commend so much run-of-the-mill, if not downright bad artwork – many potential buyers, their being reluctant to be made the fool of, are disinclined to spend more than a pittance to purchase any sort of art – ergo, all the fuzzy talk about affordable art. And, I must confess that I just don’t know what the meaning of affordable is – when applied to art. Perhaps, your being an artist who’s somewhat conversant with the jargon of the art world, you can educate me – by telling me just what kind of artwork would fall within the category: affordable art?”

NT: “No doubt, what its promoters want to infer is that an affordable piece of art is something akin to an affordable car. But, aside from the aesthetic needs of an exceptional few (and some do exist) who find art a necessity of life, art, unlike the car, is a total luxury: one that can be easily done without. What’s affordable for most potential buyers of cars (all of which, no matter the price, must be at least serviceable – and, in time it will still have a value – if not for resale, then at least for junk) is based on their ability to pay for a known and usable commodity: one with a freely obtained competitive price.

“Yet, the peddlers of affordable art claim that its affordability makes it as logical to buy as an affordable car, TV set, wristwatch or house; this, despite those items all having readily accepted and well-understood parametric descriptions – and values. However, currently, anything and everything is being touted as Contemporary Art; and, since Contemporary Art brooks no boundaries, it cannot be defined. Since everything is art, there must surely be a piece of this ubiquitous art that’s affordable. And, this may very well be true. However, if it’s also true that anything can be considered art, then using the term affordable art is a nonsensical truism. Moreover, since the parallel claim is that everyone’s an artist (the inference then being that everything that anyone does is art) the use of the term affordable – where art is concerned – is, besides being an absurdity, merely a salesman’s deceptive flummery.

“No one goes about telling you that if you buy a cheap affordable car (at one percent of the cost of a one-of-a-kind racer, or even a luxury limousine), it will increase in value, by leaps and bounds. Yet, it’s a common ploy, employed by many artists and galleries, to imply, or, in many instances to state outright, that with time the artwork being offered for sale will, most assuredly, increase in value – and possibly even make its owner rich (their promise to buy the work back if not satisfied – assuming that they’re still in business, appears to be just another sales-pitch ploy). And, I might add, that if by purchasing affordable art the intent is to get rich, the buyer would stand a better chance if he bought lottery tickets costing the same amount.”

SK: “So, from what you’ve been saying all along, I gather that when the term affordable is used as an adjective to modify the noun, art, you feel it makes affordable art into an oxymoron. This, because you believe, as far as art is concerned, that affordable is synonymous with cheap, and

if it's cheap, there's little chance that it can truthfully be considered to be art – let alone, fine art.”

NT: “That’s exactly right. And, as a case in point, here in India, at an outdoor exhibition facility, I’ve seen photocopies of inconsequential drawings, and of insignificant paintings (signed by the “artists” – WOW!), being touted as prints – and being sold as affordable art. Now, as everyone, even those merely functioning on the periphery of the art world – which includes an awful lot of folks in residence in Mumbai – must surely realize: a Xerox copy of an original work may very-well be affordable, but it’s definitely not art – nor is it a print. To apply the term print to a photocopy (aka – a Xerox copy) is fraudulent.”

SK: “I see what you’re driving at. Fearing to be made a fool, those people who would like to own a work (solely for what they perceive to be its aesthetic value) are so intimidated by the gobbledygook surrounding the worth of Contemporary Art, that they’re reluctant to spend more than a small sum to satisfy their I-know-nothing-about-art, but I-know-what-I-like aesthetic needs.”

NT: “That’s pretty-much what I believe. And, I might add that these are the same sort of folks who, in the past, were ridiculed-for-their-lack-of-taste as buyers of much of what was to eventually become museum-quality art. However, they tended to pay a fair price when satisfying their preferences in art.

“But, not wishing to be accused of being a dinosaur or a hypocrite, I must add that there’s nothing at all wrong with someone selling a photocopied work – as a photocopy. It’s only when the term print is used to describe a photocopy (whether or not it’s given free of charge or touted and sold as being affordable art), that it becomes a fraudulent act. It seems obvious that the intent of the seller or gift-giver

(whether or not the artist or his or her agent), when misrepresenting the nature of a work, is to deceive.”

SK: “Correct me if I’m wrong. As I understand it, when the term print refers to a work of art, it implies that it’s been produced as a result of the application of certain accepted, complex forms of graphic reproduction – with each step either approved by or under the direct control of the artist. The work may be a single unit, or one of a large edition. And if it’s a limited edition – each print is normally signed and numbered by the artist. Moreover, since a print (in art-world parlance) is accepted as an original work of art – and a photocopy of a work of art is not a print (ergo, a photo of a print is not considered a work of art), its use by artists or galleries to describe a Xerox copy of an original work of art should, at the very least, be considered deceitful – if not downright crooked.”

NT: “That sounds very legalistic, but my observations about fraud (when involved in the sale of art) are very much like those said about pornography, ‘I may not be able to define it, but I know it when I see it’.

“All of which reminds me of an incident that occurred at what is usually considered the first significant open-air art show in America. The exhibition has been held twice yearly in New York’s Greenwich Village ever since its beginnings during the Great Depression of the 1930’s. This was a period when buying art (being a luxury item) was the last thing on people’s minds. So, the outdoor exhibit was intended to give recognized artists a chance to sell their work at what was considered affordable prices. However, since there were, at the time, recognized criteria for what was considered art, in no case did affordable mean dirt-cheap. And, although little got sold, what did, fell within the parameters of what was accepted as art.

“As America, during WWII, spent herself out of the depression, people had more money to dispose of. Yet, many buyers, still affected by the depression, looked for bargains. So, instead of looking to buy art at a low but fair price from someone better known, they were lured to the work displayed by an obscure *artist*. The work, to the unwary bargain-hunters seemed downright cheap. And, as a result, the artist sold every one of his works.

“In those days, used magazines that contained numerous illustrations by competent commercial artists could be bought dirt-cheap on Manhattan’s lower Fourth Avenue. What the artist had done, was cut out the best pictures and paste them on a small square of masonite, and then cover each with of coat of varnish (to give them the appearance of an oil painting). He then put each one in a simple home-made frame. Perhaps those buyers of his cheap (affordable?) art never discovered the fraud, or perhaps they did, but were too embarrassed to admit that they had been duped.

“Now, had the artist been honest, and told the bargain-hunting buyers that the art work was obtained by cutting a page out of a magazine, he would have been selling affordable art honestly. And so, the moral of the story is that – affordable art is hardly ever art.”

SK: “In conclusion, if I understand you correctly, if it’s really art, it should be fairly-priced (though not necessarily expensive), and if it really is good and yet it’s still cheap, then, in all probability, the buyer is cheating the artist out of a fair price. Much as when buying a car: you should get just what you pay for. If not, one or the other party to the sale is being cheated.”

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SKUNK: “Recently, I came across an article titled *Art smart* that appeared in the Mumbai edition of the Times of India. It was a multiple-choice question and answer test. And, while the questions seemed ludicrous (since few had anything to do with art), some of the answers given bothered me even more.”

Nainsink Tagore: “Yes, I recall reading the article, and I believe it stated that by taking the test the reader could determine his or her art IQ. However, what it corroborated, was my opinion that art, as far as Indian publishers were concerned, (as well as many in America) was merely a not-too-profitable adjunct to the running of a newspaper: witness the low caliber of the overwhelming number of their art critics. However, although I don’t wish to make any sort of a claim to being an expert on art history – because I’m not, I was horrified by some of the answers given to the ridiculous questions.”

SK: “Oh, am I glad to hear you say that. I was beginning to think that much of what little I knew about art was wrong.”

NT: “Out of curiosity, since the article had *Art* in its heading, I began reading the piece. The esoteric nature of some of the questions gave me the impression that they were taken from a discarded Jeopardy quiz program. The answer to the first question had to do with Dali’s suspension from an art school: the answer, if true, was hardly a significant bit of art wisdom that India’s art-loving cognoscenti (or anyone, for that matter) needed to acquire. There were other questions that were equally insignificant, such as: At what age did Goya begin his art education? And, how many years did it take to build Paris’ Notre Dame Cathedral?”

“Perhaps, had it not been for my believing that the answers to three of the ten questions were incorrect, I would have

accepted the answers to the silly, peripherally-associated-with-art questions as harmless but meaningless fun. However, those obvious goofs caused me to question the reliability of many of the answers to the questions, which, in turn, caused me to feel that the article was prepared by an MFA college-of-art instructor to determine whether or not his students had read their art-history assignment. (Few, if any, working artists would ever bother to go out of their way to memorize the answers to the kind of nonsensical questions which were so obviously obtained from one of those now-ubiquitous art-history books for freshman.)

“ Just for the record, the correct answers to three of the questions were:

- Charlton Heston portrayed Michelangelo. (But, does it really matter, and just what does this have to do with art?)
- The French painter at Argenteuil was the impressionist painter Monet. (Something artists would know from having seen his fabulous paintings.)
- The term *relief* applies to a form of sculpture that is not fully three-dimensional. (How anyone claiming to know a damn thing about art could be ignorant of this fact, is beyond comprehension.)

“If there is a lesser-known Pieta located in the Louvre, (and I don’t recall seeing it there) then the paper is correct. However, in that case, since his most famous Pieta can be found in St Peter’s in Rome, and there’s another fairly well-known, roughly finished Pieta that Michelangelo had sculpted late in his life (one depicting himself as an old man) located in the Cathedral in Florence, the question was obviously meant to trick the reader – otherwise it’s error number four.

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“Now then, even if an art student goofed on thirty percent of a test (three out of ten wrong answers) he could still get a passing grade of “C” – a grade that entitles a student to get a degree in art. The party writing the test for the Mumbai Times – on an open book test – also got thirty percent of the answers wrong. It seems to me, that the publishers of the most prominent paper in Mumbai should expect better than a “C” grade for any of their writers.

“If art is really important to the paper and their readership, then the irony of the answer to the following query should be pertinent. What do you call a medical student with the lowest grade in his graduating class? The answer is, Doctor. For the recipient of a fine-arts degree, the answer would be, Artist.

“The sad thing is, that when applied to fine art, and when that “C” student gets a Master of Fine Arts degree, the irony of the doctor joke would be lost. Why? Because, nobody gives a damn. For, although that individual, no matter what his or her ability as an artist, can claim to be a master of fine arts, few, indeed, with MFAs have the right to claim that they have mastered the ability to consider themselves artists. In reality, it only qualifies the degree-bearer to be a teacher of fine art. And, so, in the overwhelming majority of cases, we have the art-school graduate with but modest credentials as an artist hired to teach tuition-paying college students how to pass the tests that will allow them to become a teacher of the next generation’s art teachers.

“When all that an MFA degree does, is enable its bearer to try out for a position as a teacher of art – one wonders why any significance at all is given to it. When there are no

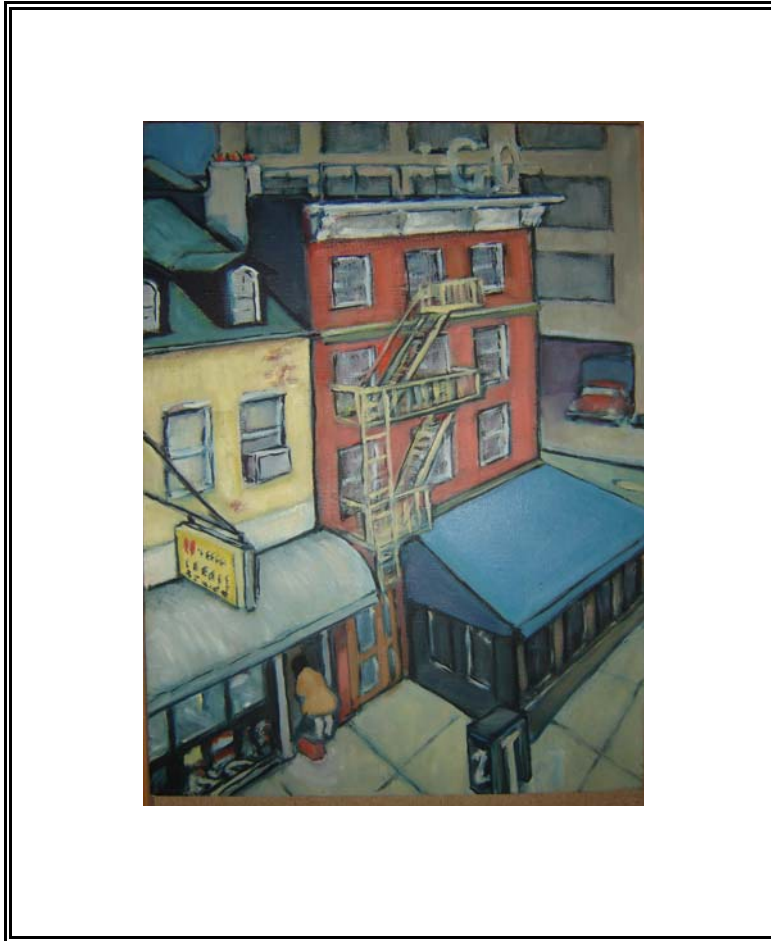
criteria for the giving of even an inkling as to just what Contemporary Art is, how on earth can a degree in fine arts be earned?

“Perhaps obtainers of MFA degrees, due to their ability to rationalize any evidence of their incompetence – should be qualified to perform as courtroom attorneys and political hacks. However, it boggles the mind to assume that an MFA degree, should imply that the bearer of it is a master of the fine arts. This, when it’s doled out to so many students who, at graduation, have acquired skills, that at best would qualify them as apprentices – or, in all but the rarest cases, as journeymen.”

SK: “I guess this all boils down to the old saying about art, that it’s only one percent inspiration and ninety-nine percent perspiration. So, except in very rare situations, calling university students masters of fine art who have but a limited number of hours of studio work per week, and the rest of the time spent talking and reading about art, is preposterous. And, from what I can determine, it’s this that you feel has a major input into the cause for the low esteem of the artist – as an artist. With no criteria, it’s the non-art concerns that determine the art market and the prestige and economic well-being of the artist.”

NT: “On that note, I think it’s time to end this interview.”

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West SoHo - 1990 (oil)

VI

CITIBANK

Nance had his yearly appointment for a checkup from the ophthalmologist at HIP. And, since the doctor always managed to be late (often by hours) and after being advised that his turn would not come up for at least half an hour, he decided to visit Citibank, which was located but a few steps from HIP. This was before the uncovering of a plethora of investment-related scandals, and before the destruction of Citibank's One World Trade Center branch where he had had his account (back in 1975, Nance had his office in the same, soon-to-be-destroyed building).

Passing by a battery of ATMs, he entered the main portion of the bank (Citibank's branch at West 68th Street and Amsterdam Avenue). There, behind a small desk bearing the sign, "INFORMATION", stood a young, attractive and conservatively-dressed, African-American woman, to whom, in response to her query, Nance stated that he wanted to transfer some money from his non-interest-bearing, checking account to one that would give him some return (in the year 2000, a five or six percent return was not unusual). Thereupon, the young woman led him to a row of comfortable-looking, chrome and imitation black-leather chairs. She then left, after first informing him that an

advisor would be with him momentarily. Within a minute or so, a stylishly-suited young man who appeared to have an indiscriminate Euro-Caucasian-American background, approached and led him to a cubicle situated beneath a sign reading: *Investment Counselor*. The counselor, without stopping, asked Nance to be seated – as he proceeded to sit opposite him at his desk.

The man, much like virtually all Citibank employees, regardless of their race or ancestral national origin, manifested the bearing and attitude generally attributed to what is thought to be a typical, generic real-American – with nary an obviously-ethnic employee on the bank's payroll.

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[For whatever the reason, but probably due to a carryover of the work-ethic demands by employers during the Great Depression and reinforced by the effects of the post-WWII recession – (while better-paying jobs, as officers and such, went to WASPy, college-bred, men) even low-paying bank jobs went only to those applicants who were neatly dressed, clean shaven and recently barbered – and who had acquired expert stenographic and clerical skills (except in the case of pages), and an assumed, then-meaningful, high school education. At that time, there was a certain prestige (as well as security) that went with a job at a bank.

[In 1948, within a year after his discharge from the army, as a nineteen-year-old, post-fighting-war veteran of WWII, Nance worked as a page at the 55 Wall Street, main office of Citibank – then known as National City Bank. The war had only recently been over, and the concept that we were all Americans still prevailed. (Currently, everyone in our nation of immigrants seems bent on stressing their ancestors' pre-American roots – which probably has its

origins in a reaction to the bigotry-based, exclusionary attitudes and practices of the not-so-distant past.)

[What's most remarkable, is that, back in the early post-WWII years, despite tacit dress codes, the bank's employees managed to maintain their individuality. This, despite all male office workers' arriving on-time in the morning, newspaper underarm and wearing a well-pressed, conservatively-styled suit, white shirt, simple tie and shined shoes – as well as being clean shaven and regularly barbered. And women, despite their also being required to dress somewhat conservatively (never wearing slacks – or even considering wearing anything resembling a mini skirt, push up and out bra or a blouse allowing for the display of a belly button) also managed to present themselves as distinct and unique persons.

[Folks today, even when at work, in order to give themselves an identity, go about pigeon-holing themselves into one or another racial, religious, ethnic, sexually-oriented or with-it grouping. On the other hand, corporate entities such as the Yankees and Citicorp are able to get their employees to comply with their seemingly inflexible demands that all their employees, at the very least, give the impression, by displaying the attitude and appearance of that non-existent ideal: the pure-bred, real-WASP American, that they too are real Americans – though only near-WASP ones.]

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The investment counselor (unlike the current crop of Yankee players who, despite their verbal shortcomings, are obligated under the terms of their contracts to speak to TV interviewers) was articulate to the point of being glib – if not oily. He reminded Nance of a sleazy car salesman from New Jersey with whom, many years back, he had had bothersome dealings.

Once seated, Nance told the advisor why he was there: he wanted to transfer some money from his checking account to one that would bear interest. (In the past, Nance had arranged to have any money coming to him placed in a checking account; this allowed for the obtaining of ready cash through Citibank's numerous ATMs – here and abroad.) Nance had thought that the explanation of his needs was simple and unambiguous. However, the young man completely ignored what he said. Instead, after Nance gave him his ATM card, the advisor obtained a printout giving the details of his account. It wasn't a hell of a lot of money involved. Nevertheless, after viewing the printout, the young man started his sales pitch: one that seemed well rehearsed.

Advisor: "Tell me what your financial needs are."

Nance again stated what they were: "I want to place funds now in my non-interest-bearing checking account into one that's also risk-free, but that earns interest."

Advisor: "The interest on that would be so low, that after you pay taxes on it, it won't even cover inflation. Now, if you invest in a mutual fund you can earn ten or even fifteen percent on your investment – and that's after taxes. You've heard of mutual funds, haven't you?"

Nance: "Yes, of course. But, that's not why I'm here. I think a money market fund is insured and, if so, that should do the trick for me."

The advisor persisted for another ten or fifteen minutes trying to convince Nance that he should invest in a stock or mutual fund – where he'd earn a good return on his investment. Since the only one who could be sure of making a profit was the bank and the investment counselor – and all that Nance wanted was that he and his wife would

live out their lives without being a burden to others – he didn't alter his plans. And, he reiterated: "I want to place funds now in my non-interest-bearing checking account into one that's also risk-free, but that earns some interest."

Like all con artists and career salesmen, the investment counselor prided himself in his ability to sway the gullible. And, since he, like his fellow pitchmen, ardently believed, a la Barnum, that a sucker is born every minute, he felt defeated. And, somewhat curtly, advised Nance to sit outside a nearby cubicle, and wait 'til he was called.

[It must be noted that Nance continued to dress the same way he had for years – which meant he wore simple dungarees (now always called jeans) and went tie-less. He was bearded, and his hair was long and in a ponytail: the attire of either a bum or a wealthy eccentric; but, he was neither; he was only non-conventional – and that tended to confuse many, especially non-artists.]

After waiting but a few minutes, a tall well-dressed and attractive middle-aged, African-American woman approached him and asked, in a rather above it all attitude, if she could help him. Again, Nance explained what he wanted to do – which was to place funds from his non-interest-bearing checking account into one that's also risk-free, but that earns some interest.

Again, Nance was asked to enter a cubicle (it had no overhead sign) and be seated. Again the Citicorp employee sat opposite him and again asked him what he wanted. And, again he stated his simple requirements. At this point, the Citicorp employee assisted him in transferring a few thousand dollars into a money-market account.

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[By 2004, banks, their having been chastised for their fraudulent dealings leading up to the puncturing of the stock-market bubble, now appear to be trying a different tack. Prominent banks (Chase and Citibank included) are sending checks, starting at as little as a few dollars, payable to credit-card holders and depositors as a means of enticing them into paying for scare-generated, unnecessary, additional services.]

[The more things change]



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Still Life -- 1968 (oil)

VIII

The Seaman's Tale

When purchasing a New York to Mumbai round-trip ticket, if requested, Air India would, at the time, throw in a free Mumbai/Delhi round-trip. With the help of an acquaintance, an executive at the airline, Nance was able to forfeit the Delhi to Mumbai portion, which enabled him to fly to JFK directly from Delhi – without the necessity of returning to Mumbai to catch the very same flight (which was not only beneficial to Nance, but also to the airline). Accordingly, since it was no longer required that he go jackassing about, Nance decided to leave Mumbai a week early so as to spend time in Delhi visiting with friends before his departure from India.

The hotel Nance normally stayed at, when in Delhi, was the Ashok Yatri Nivas, a government-run hotel with some five hundred rooms. However, since he had recalled reading something about its being up for privatization, when he arrived at the entranceway of the hotel, he was not overly put out when he found it closed – and in the process of being refurbished..

Nevertheless, Nance was more than a little annoyed when the driver of the pre-paid taxi that he had hired at the airport (it's the only way to insure that you won't be "taken for a ride") tried to hit him with a hefty fee to drive a few blocks to another hotel. Nance, realizing that both the driver and the dispatcher (who had determined the fare) must have been well aware of its being closed – it was a major hotel, he refused to pay it. Instead Nance told the driver to unload

his baggage, telling him that he'd hail a three wheeler to take him to another hotel; thereupon the driver agreed to a more reasonable increase (which amounted to no more than the tip he would have received, had he taken Nance to the new hotel without trying to hustle him). Nance ended up at a nearby Y – where everyone was most accommodating – in fact, to such a degree, that he almost forgot the reasons why he, and so many others: Indians and visitors alike, avoided Delhi whenever possible (it's known for its hustling of the unwary).

Except for the slight annoyance in getting to the hotel, the remainder of Nance's stay (with the exception of a day with Delhi belly) was more than enjoyable. For those unfamiliar with Delhi and the goings on in those areas frequented by tourists, with their overly-aggressive, badgering hawkers and touts – as well as the reported molestation of young women, the fact that one could find a visit to the city enjoyable would have no significance. Nevertheless, when compared to the incessant touting and hawking projected by the monstrous, garish signs in the Times Square area of New York: all of which were designed to hustle unsophisticated tourists and out-of-towners – what goes on in Delhi is really small time.

*

An Indian lady friend, whom Nance originally met at the poetry readings held at the National Center for the Performing Arts in South Mumbai, was at the time staying with friends in one of the upper-class, outlying sections of Delhi. She was there to settle some legal issues regarding her family's property.

In Mumbai, it was the practice of this lady to invite a few of those attending the poetry readings (they ended around eight in the evening) to have dinner at her home or at one of

the exclusive clubs of which she, her husband and children were members. Nance was one of those who were frequently invited. Often, she'd come to the readings by car, and then drive a few of the participants to her large, well-appointed apartment – or a private club (all of which were located in one or another upscale section of South Mumbai). The trip was always an adventure – her passengers never knowing whether or not they'd arrive in one piece. To say that the lady's driving was erratic, would be a gross understatement. However, whether or not it was her karma or that of her passengers, she always got them there safe and sound.

The lady – “of a certain age” (she had three children in their twenties – all were young men – all were very fond of her) was married to a prosperous businessman – though, what his business was, was never mentioned.

The British, especially in Empire times, were never known for their cuisine; if wealthy Brits had wished to satisfy their gourmet tastes, they went to Paris. Despite this, many amongst India's growing upper middle-class blindly accept and imitate (as best they can) every aspect of Western culture (or lack thereof). And the food served in the restaurants of South Mumbai's now-Indo-Raj private clubs appears to replicate that which was served to the Anglo-Raj prior to their being displaced by the Indian wannabe Raj. Nevertheless, for Nance, with his American upbringing, since it was at least palatable, it was a welcome change from his regular diet of heavily-spiced, though often delicious, Indian food.

It was through this gracious lady, that Nance met a wonderful Indian couple. The lady (a Sikh) was a retired Air India hostess and her husband, a Hindu, had sailed for years as an engineer in the merchant marine. Both were worldly. Both spoke perfect, American-influenced English

so typical of all the better-educated, post-independence peoples of the entire Subcontinent – albeit, with a touch of that rhythmic Indian accent. The influence of American-English on modern-day Indians is owed to America’s dominance in: intelligence technology; movies; TV; air traffic; pop music; literature; dress; junk food and you name it. (Nevertheless, most educated older Indians, as well as those younger who try to put on the dog, attempt to speak a stilted, upper-class British English.)

On Nance’s last day in Delhi, when accompanying the two ladies on a shopping trip to the Indian equivalent of a cross between a suburban shopping mall and a street fair, Nance and the ex-seagoing engineer, made small talk while tagging along and then waiting in front of each store or stall for the ladies to barter and sometimes make a purchase. None of the tales the two men exchanged were particularly blue, though, especially in middle-class India, they probably wouldn’t have been told in mixed company. It was near the end of the three-hour shopping trip, by which time they had struck up what could best be described as a friendship based, at least on Nance’s part, on a respect for the seaman’s intelligence and overall decency, that he told Nance the following G-rated tale:

The Tale

It was some years ago. I had been at sea for almost a year, and left the ship at a port within about ninety kilometers of where a distant relation lived. (As you’re probably aware, relations, no matter how far removed, are, here in India, considered cousins, uncles or aunts.) It had been a long time since we last met, but I had an open invitation to spend time with him. And, when I called from the port, he insisted that I come by, and that he would put me up. We had always gotten along, and I looked forward to seeing him again.

Since the bus that I had been told to take was late in leaving, it was already getting dark by the time it left. The bus was expected to take three hours to reach my initial destination. Although called a small town, it was actually a typical rural Indian village. And, it was from there that I was told I could hire an auto-rickshaw to take me to my cousin's house.

Since he was a fairly high-ranking government employee, which meant that he was one of the more prosperous people in the area, my cousin told me that all the drivers would know where he lived – despite his house being several kilometers away. In all events, by the time the bus finally dropped me off at the village, except for the light coming from a bare bulb at the bus stop, it was pitch black. Every little stall and storefront was shuttered and padlocked. And, even the truck-stop dhaba was closed up for the night. However, much like any sensible person when traveling in India, I carried a flashlight. Yet, despite beaming it around, I couldn't see anyone about.

I was all alone. Only a few feral dogs were up and about. I threw a rock at the biggest one, and when he yelped and ran away, the rest did too. As I was standing there considering what I'd do, I heard the singing of what could only be that of a slightly tipsy man. I beamed my flashlight in the direction of the singing. I could make out a muscular, poorly-dressed elderly man. He was obviously light-headed from drink (or maybe hash). And, although I have to admit that I was a little frightened, I hailed him and asked if he knew of a hotel – he didn't. I then asked him if he knew where a certain government official lived (I didn't tell him it was my cousin) – he said he did. And when I asked him for directions, telling him of my intention to walk there, he laughed and told me it was many kilometers away, and even if I could find my way in the darkness I'd have to fight off the dogs the entire time.

Since he could see that I was carrying a flashlight, I thought he was being a little melodramatic – but, nevertheless, correct.

The man then turned to me, and seeing my plight, told me to come home with him. I looked at the man (maybe scrutinized would be more accurate): he was obviously very poor; his clothes: a well-worn shirt that hung out over a plaid longhi; on his feet, barely usable chappals; and a loosely-wound turban drooped over a somewhat wizened face. After giving it some thought, I decided to let my fate be determined by the Gods. So, I hoisted my sea bag onto my shoulder and followed him to his house – I call it a house, but it was really more of a sturdy shack

It was not quite as bad as the shanties you find in the worst slums of India's bigger cities, but it couldn't really be considered a house. It was a one room wooden shack that rested on a platform that was raised about two feet off the ground. It had a roof of thin corrugated iron on which big rocks were strewn to prevent it from being blown off.

On entering, the man turned on the overhead bulb. This woke the three people who were sleeping. Two rose from thin mattress-like blankets that were strewn on the floor. Along one side I could make out a charpai on which lay a blanketed elderly woman (she turned out to be the man's mother). His mother woke and sat at the edge of the charpai – and nodded a welcome to me. The youth of about seventeen or eighteen, after adjusting his dhoti, rubbed his eyes and gave me a welcoming smile. The other person was the man's wife – draped in a loose nightdress. Unlike so many wives of well-to-do Indians, she was thin, and when standing had the posture of a ballet dancer – only with feet well-formed and not pinched or deformed. She seemed a little annoyed at being wakened, but she too smiled, though she never looked me in the eye.

*

No sooner were nods exchanged than I was offered water from a battered Bisleri bottle, followed within a matter of minutes by a cup of hot tea. They would have cooked food for me, but I was too tired – and besides, even if I were hungry, I would have told them not to bother.

The man's mother then rose and motioned for me to take her bed. I refused, but she and all the others insisted that I take it. And, I was so tired that I did. In the morning, after realizing that his mother had, of course, joined the others in sleeping on the blanket-covered floor, I felt guilty for having taken advantage of their hospitality. My guilt was only increased when, after I was given a bowl of sira and a cup of tea for breakfast – before I left, they insisted that I have rice and daal.

In the morning, the man arranged to have a three wheeler come by to take me to my cousin's house. I made an attempt to pay him something for their kindness – but he refused. Nevertheless, I left money under the blanket before leaving.

When my friend was told of the affair, he decided to do something for them. He arranged to have the son, who was literate, hired as a clerk.

As you know, it's the exceptional Indian who isn't aware of his daily horoscope. So, I wonder if the man's horoscope didn't read something like this: "A stranger will come into your life who will bring you good fortune." Come to think of it, that may have been mine too.

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Dhaba - 1991(oil)

IX

Tourism -- India

A while back, SKUNK came across an article stating that India will be spending fifty million US dollars to promote tourism in India. The money will be spent on advertising the wonders of that country – all in an effort to entice the big-money spenders to come to India and stay at the most expensive hotels, eat in the most expensive restaurants and utilize the nation's most expensive means of transportation. The tours offered to the big-buck spenders stress luxury, which is intended to shield the visitor from the real India – that of real people. And, those people whom the well-heeled look out at through the dark-glass windows of an air-conditioned luxury taxi or through picture-windows from their seats on one of those Disney-like, fantasy train trips, are the shanty-living impoverished who line the outskirts of train stations and the homeless found sleeping at the train stations at night. However, if those folks were to get out and move around, they'd find the overwhelming majority of all Indians to be polite, caring and independent individuals. Indians, as a whole, believe that they're responsible for the karma-caused status of their current life. And, it's that carryover from India's earliest, pre-Aryan-invasion civilization – one going back, at the very least, well over five millennia, that continues to permeate the sensibility of even the poorest Indians.

[For the most part, even when considering those Indians who now follow India's far from ancient religions – those

of the earliest Moslem invaders along with the Judeo-Christian and other guest peoples, one finds that they too have retained or absorbed, at the very least, a noticeable degree of the karma-based beliefs of ancient India's pre-Harappan civilization.]

As a result of their being deprived of the ability to meet with everyday Indians: those of a broad cross-section of the population, the well-heeled tourists-cum-travelers come face-to-face with but a handful of paid-to-be-obsequious Indians: those hired to cater to their needs. The result is that prosperous foreigners see an India that is no different than that intended for viewing on tourist-enticing, cable television. None of the people they come in contact with are truly representative of the Indian people. Those hired to cater to their needs are no more representative of Indians, than bell-hops, insurance salesmen and used-car dealers are of Americans.

Anyone who grew up in America during the depression, when few had money but when few considered themselves poor, would realize that those living in relative poverty (when it's broad based – as are those hundreds of millions in India) still have a full and meaningful existence, albeit, money-wise a very marginal one. *Nonetheless, this is not intended to mitigate the guilt of those causing the unfairness inherent in the de facto enforcement of the caste system or the continuing existence of the abject poverty for so many of India's multi-millions of peoples.*

The well-to-do, potential visitor to India, who is the one being appealed to, will be staying at the same sort of hotels, eating the same assortment of foods and traveling by the same means of transportation as he either did or could have, had he stayed in his homeland. Of course, in all probability, all this would be somewhat cheaper in India. But if it's truly the big spender who's being targeted, then the price

differential should have little or no effect – insofar as his decision to come to India is concerned.

[Middle-class Chinese and Japanese Buddhists, do come to India in a pilgrimage to Bodhgaya, Gaya, Sarnath – those places where Siddhartha Gautama was known to have resided, gained enlightenment and preached. However, if it's for exotic pleasures of the flesh, gambling and high living, – wealthy Asians, including Indians, don't, as a rule, vacation in India.]

NRIs (Non-Resident-Indians) have been visiting India all along. So, the only folks who would be influenced by these come-on ads will be the middle-class, Judeo-Christian Euro-Caucasians who want to live-it-up on the cheap, and in the same manner as did the racist Raj during the British occupation of India – a time when Indians were not admitted into the dining rooms and bars of the catering-to-Europeans hotels, or as guests, paying or otherwise, in their rooms. And, even to this day, at the better hotels in India, Euro-Caucasians, no matter how slovenly attired, can be seen sitting in the lobby – while Indians, if not very-much acceptably-dressed are routinely questioned, and invariably asked to leave. This, by the Indian lackeys of the Indo-Raj.

[A similar happening occurred at a Jewish-owned hotel that abutted Manhattan's Diamond District, which has many bearded, dressed-in-black Hasidic Jews working in the area. It was the habit of many to relax in the hotel's lobby, and when asked to leave, they claimed anti-Semitism. And, the bearded men in black were then left alone by the Jewish owners of the hotel. One wonders when Indians are going to truly reclaim their country.]

The hippie types, trekkers, ashram-goers and Indophile tourists of the past were far from big spenders. However, since their attitude towards India's culture and her people

tended to be respectful, and they carried that attitude back to the affluent West, the true economic benefits to India, as a whole, exceeded any benefits that can possibly accrue from feeding the egos of the West's middle- and upper-middle-class, potentially-racist, Raj wannabes.

The new breed of Western-type hotels, restaurants, bars and transportation are primarily being built to satisfy the needs of India's multinational, corporate, businessmen who will come to India no matter what. They come to talk about making money, and rarely spend their valuable time lingering amongst India's real people and the physical evidence of India's historical, aesthetic and religious past – and how it's come to influence modern Western culture.

[The writer recalls a week-long stay, during October of 1992 at a moderately upscale hotel in Aurangabad (from where he visited Ajanta and Ellora). The hotel had a cocktail lounge, and while he was sitting at the bar, he got into conversation with an American executive working for a Peace Corps-type organization. The man, quite intelligent, had been staying at the hotel for three months – yet he stated that he'd not bothered to go to Ajanta. The caves of Ajanta, a World-Heritage Site, have sophisticated paintings dating back prior to the current era, and of a quality not matched in the West until the height of the Renaissance. But the gentleman had more than ample time to hang one on night after night – while berating the Government of India for allowing citizens to live near electric transmitting towers.]

With the possible exception of the former tiny Portuguese enclaves (where remnants of a Catholic ambivalence towards the acceptance of human frailty still prevails), India is still, at least outwardly, a prudish country. As a result, those middle-income, middle-class, Judeo-Christian Euro-Caucasians (especially those who would have to travel

halfway around the world) are not about to come to India for a not-to-be-available wine, dine and make-merry, Club-Med-type vacation. The new, not-so-cheap hotels found cropping up throughout India, despite their being ever so Westernized, will not make up for the nation's general lack of sex appeal: the same attitude of Victorian prudery (despite the West's zeroing in on the *Kama Sutra*) pervades the atmosphere in the Westernized hotels, as it does over the rest of the Subcontinent.

[And, except for an occasional wealthy young Indian couple, or Indian businessman on a tryst with a highly-paid respectable-looking prostitute, Khajuraho, for all the erotic content of its temples, doesn't really add much, if anything, to India's sex appeal as a nation.]

As the birthplace of some of the world's most ancient of all religions, the morality of the peoples of the Subcontinent influenced the spiritual substance of virtually all the world's major faiths. And, despite the more modern-day, religio-ethical inputs to Indian identity (e.g.: Buddhism, Jainism, Hinduism, Catholicism, Parsiism, Islam, Sikhism, Judeo-Christianity, Atheism, Animism), the evidence of that underlying ancient, Harappan culture persists: it appears to be ingrained, at least to some degree, into the ethos of virtually all the people of the Subcontinent. It is what makes India a nation.

That said, it's doubtful, that the folks with deep pockets who are being targeted to come to India, are interested in esoteric doings such as: investigating Ajanta, Mount Abu, the step-wells of Gujarat, ancient mosques, temples and their ilk. India's tourist industry must come to grips with the fact that no country in the Subcontinent, despite the draw of the fabulous Taj Mahal, has the ability to cause many upper-middle-class Westerners – who are not NRI's or employees of multinational corporations – to visit India.

So, instead of trying to attract the deep-pocketed Westerner, the governments of the various nations of the Subcontinent would better serve their countries if they concentrated on making adventurous Bohemian types feel at home. Once they're attracted, it will become the in-thing to do – and the well-off middle-class Westerner will follow – much as they've done in cities like Paris and New York – as well as in so many other cities that were once known to be Bohemian destinations.

*

Europe's far-ranging diaspora of expatriates tend to return as tourists to their forebears' ancestral lands and to those lands to which they acknowledge a cultural, genetic or religious connection. And, since the West's people have, by hook or by crook, acquired an unduly large percentage of the world's wealth, Europe's cultural centers attract the overwhelming majority of upper-middle-income, Judeo-Christian, Euro-Caucasian non-resident European tourists (Europe's equivalent to India's NRIs). As a result, cities like Athens, Rome, Venice, Paris and London continue to have prosperous tourist industries.

In addition, a country like Thailand has attracted the well-heeled sun-cum-sin-seekers – many of whom come from nearby Japan and Australia as well as from other nearby nations whose people have been made rich by trading with the West. (*It's just possible that a few of the tourist beaches in Goa might also qualify as a destination for the sun-cum-sin seekers – but they don't attract many folks with deep pockets. And, besides, the sin there is barely R rated.*)

Since so many Indians have been brainwashed into believing that their own culture is either nonexistent, negligible, inferior or wicked, they've adopted for

themselves the cultural history of the West, sans its warts. Nevertheless, many NRIs and their offspring who reside in the West do return as visitors and tourists to the Subcontinent. But, they're not, as a rule, big spenders. Moreover, it's doubtful that the fifty-million dollars that the Indian government intends to spend on tourist enticing ads, will have much of an effect on the NRIs decision to come to India.

Better India spent the two hundred-or-so crore rupees on bettering the living conditions of a million Indians now living in deep poverty. Ultimately, that would surely influence far more Westerners to visit India than the efforts to emulate the doings of Coca-Cola, Pepsi-Cola and all the other big-time advertisers.

-◇-

X



He Met a Lovely Lady
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He Met a Lovely Lady

He met a Lovely Lady

He met a young and lovely lady,
when he visited the bar.
She appeared to be of legal age -
perhaps of two and twenty years.
He asked her if she would like
to spend some time with him.
To which she responded - willingly and knowingly,
With smiling affirmation.





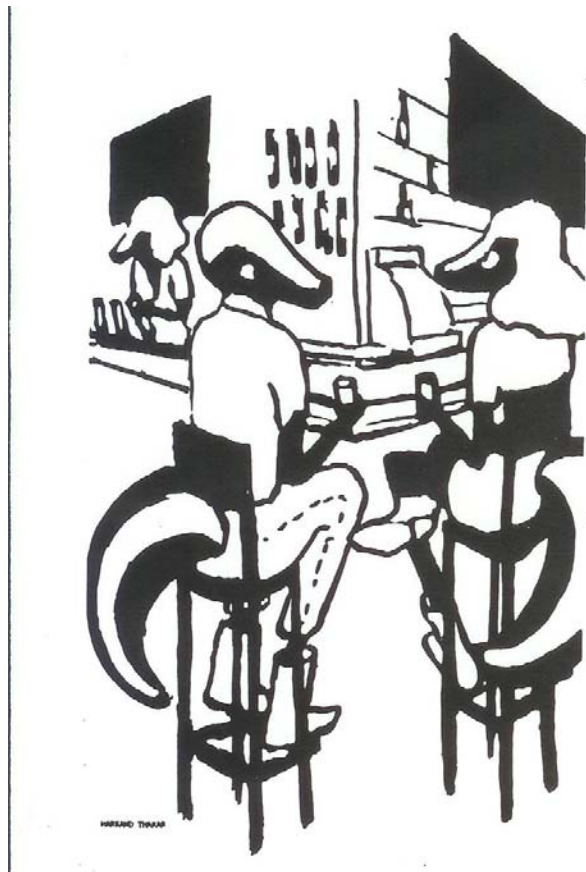
Thereupon they left the bar -
and had a simple dinner.



They then ventured to a punk-rock
funky club.



Then they danced, that is to say:
They stamped their feet,
And shook their rumps,
While gyrating hips and torsos –
Never touching one another.



Between the sets they smoked a joint,
And drank a high-priced, watery drink.
As it grew late, the lovely lady
Politely asked of him –
If he would like to see her home.
He said he'd do so gladly.



When there she asked him up, for coffee or
whatever.

She lived alone in a railroad flat:
Three tiny low-ceilinged rooms –
In a fixed-up, run-down slum –
Now called a luxury building.



Hand in hand they climbed the stairs,
To reach the fifth-floor landing.
There the lovely lady
Unlocked the sturdy door –
She required four keys to do it.
Once through the door, she,
The lovely lady, offered him a seat
And a can of tepid beer.

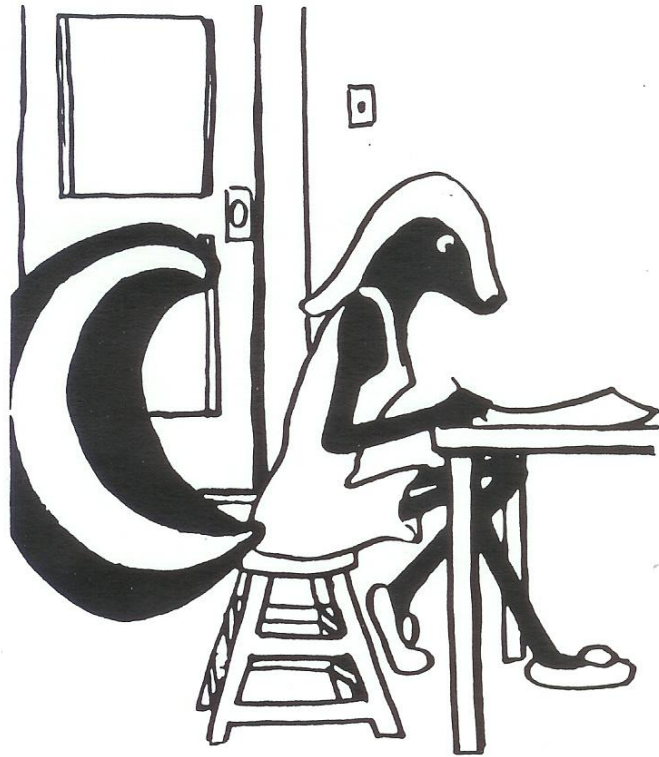


Then she left him -
Going off to change into new clothes.
Soon, out the lovely lady came,
Perfumed with hair brushed back,
Attired in a see-through,
Pink and flimsy slip.

Thereupon he led her to the couch,
Sat her down,
And read her all her rights:
Namely, that if she so desired
He would vacate the flat;
And this he'd do at once,
Without a word of protest.



“No,” said she: “I’d like for you
to stay the night with me.”

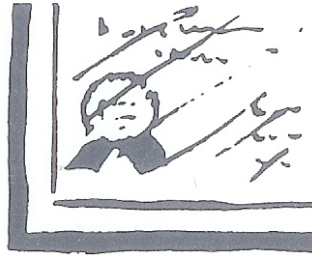


MARJANO THAKAR

He then produced
A legal-looking, printed form,
Requesting that she read and sign it.
The lovely lady perused the form,
then signed her name in full –
Attesting to the fact that her desiring him,
Was not based on his coercion.
And, that she, unconditionally,
Wanted him to remain with her –
That is to say, until the coming of the dawn.



She then produced the required proof,
That she was of legal age,
To give her consent,
To let him lie in bed with her.
Then she walked the line
He drew upon the floor –
to verify that she was sober.



He then duly noted that
Hanging high upon the wall –
Framed, with good lighting on it –
Was a document in the accepted form:
Signed and sealed
By her Freud-worshipping, biker shrink.
It affirmed that she was emotionally stable –
And that sex was unlikely
To cause her irreparable damage.



© 1981 MARSHALL TUCKER

Their respective MD's timely notes,
Were then and there exchanged.
This verified that each was free -
Of all known sexually transmitted diseases:
i.e.: Scabies, AIDS, VD and Herpes.

Retiring to her tiny chamber, he reached within
The back pocket of his jeans –
and produced a latex condom.
He then of her requested, as politely as he could,
That she use a proven spermicide -
As is customarily required –
Preferably Nonoxynol number nine.



She told him that she didn't have any,
And advised him, with anger in her voice:
"You should have come prepared,
If sex is what you wished to have with me."



He shrugged and said with much relief:
"I'm really glad that you can't provide it.
The preliminaries, now so much in vogue:
This modern form of foreplay,
Is not the kind for me.
And, It's killed my animal urge
For having sex with you.
So, my dear, if you don't mind,
I'd just as soon go home now –
And have my safe sex solo."

XI

Collateral Damage

Mise-en-Scene

Even before the mid-sixties, when the city was fast becoming a hairy place to live, New Yorkers with middle- and upper-middle-class incomes were moving out to the burbs – in droves. The main reasons for that earlier diaspora of Gothamites was the real-estate industry’s fostering of a racist reaction by lower-to-upper-middle-class New Yorkers to the post-WWII influx of poor Blacks from the farming areas of the segregated South and the wartime industrial cities to its north, as well as Puerto Ricans from the slums of San Juan (earlier Black and Puerto Rican migrants to the city were more middle-class and better educated). This changed the character of the city’s public schools – and with their believed consequential deterioration, even many of the city’s most liberal citizens with children moved away or took their children out of the public school system.

The upshot was, that for most of those New Yorkers with children who remained in the city (run-of-the-mill, not-so-socially-acceptable – and regardless of their race, religion or ethnicity – yet sufficiently moneyed) applied for the admission of their offspring to parochial schools (until then, mainly a Catholic thing – but it was to become somewhat of a Jewish and Protestant thing as well) and private schools, most of which, until then, had catered solely to the children

of well-heeled and well-placed Protestants and their looking and acting alike. Though not as numerous, there were also language-cum-ethnicity-based private schools that cropped up, which were designed to have the children of New York's not-so-well-off, hyphenated, former minorities avoid commingling with the city's then-new minorities.

[There were exceptions, until the mid-1960s (when it changed its policy – it had been considered elitist) the Hunter Elementary School maintained its stature as one of the best public schools in the city, if not in the country: a number of children with the highest IQ scores (which was the only criterion) were taught as part of the college's teacher-training course.]

Perhaps no place in America was more affected than New York as a result of the assassinations of John F. Kennedy and Martin Luther King – and Johnson's escalation of the war in Vietnam (“*LBJ. – LBJ. How many kids did you kill today?*”). Although Johnson's implementation of much-needed civil-rights legislation (partially an attempt to relieve his guilt for his being a Texan replacing a liberal president who was murdered in Texas), did act to mitigate, somewhat, the unrest resulting from the continuing Vietnam fiasco. However, since the Johnson administration and its supporters ignored the protests against the war – which were even coming from those Americans who had previously respected the government's decision to fight in Vietnam – it brought about a loosely-knit coalition of middle-class middle-of-the-roaders; run-of-the-mill liberals; well-to-do progressives and a large segment of those disgruntled Americans who had been disenfranchised (mainly Blacks who had been, for centuries, systematically deprived of their right to freely participate – economically and socially in the much-touted goal of all Americans: *the pursuit of happiness.*)

Between the resulting collateral turmoil in the city (race-based conflicts, criminal doings and anti-war activities) and the manipulations by the real-estate industry, life in the city became unbearable for much of Manhattan's middle-class – causing even many of those without children to leave and return to their hometowns – which were situated well beyond Manhattan's tunnels and bridges. Only the hardy, if not foolhardy folks stayed on or willingly moved from the hinterlands into what was, despite the dangers, still a somewhat intellectually and creatively vibrant city. And for about two decades they had it, pretty-much, all to themselves.

[It's doubtful, at least in the foreseeable future, that New York, with its greed-motivated, recently-fabricated Disney Land-like, brain-numbing, over-sanitized, middling-class-tourist-attracting, pretensions – will ever again produce the kind of setting that brought about those earlier spates of altruistic and aesthetically motivated activity.]

[Brooklyn is currently being touted by real-estate interests as a hotbed of intellectual activity. But, with its rents (in 2005) nearly as high as those in Manhattan, and with no magnetic focal point capable of drawing together those involved in non-conformist, imaginative activity – there's no place where those youths involved in a variety of creative fields can congregate and interact. It's difficult to conceive of any section of the now-in-the-process-of-being-gentrified Brooklyn ever offering the same sort of environment that led to New York's past dominance in the creative arts: in dance, music, literature, theater or in any of the visual arts.]

[Brooklyn remains a bedroom community, albeit with many fairly expensive restaurants – whose newer residents are more often than not the children of upper-middle-class,

well-to-do parents: who are not rich enough to buy them a more desirable, grungy apartment in the East Village.]

There was a time when the creed of greed was being played down, if not denied – which was back before the more recent era of money, money, money (as exemplified and glorified by that *real* all-American, Trump, and by his glad-to-follow-in-his-footsteps, yet-not-quite-accepted-as-being-real-Americans, money-grubbing, real-estate cohorts). It was when even open-market rents were reasonable – and a sizable number of rent-controlled apartments were available (albeit, providing one was willing to pay an under-the-table bribe). There were also slews of vacant former warehouses, as well as manufacturing and printing lofts that were up for rent throughout downtown sections of Manhattan – which served to attract, retain and nurture many of America’s most creative talents. Then, with the advent of the intellectually-challenged, screw-the-poor Reagan and his lauding of the acquisition of riches (no matter how obtained or what the consequences were for the destitute ketchup-eaters and those neither-needy-nor-greedy, middle-class, average Americans), New York’s real-estate, robber barons (despite Reagan’s having stated that he hoped New York, and one would assume her people, would drop into the ocean) willingly followed his lead – and brought about the greed-motivated, progressively very sharp increases in the city’s real-estate values – and, of course, its rents.

As a consequence, beginning in the early 1980s, despite the somewhat steadying effects realized by the earlier enactment of rent-stabilization and A.I.R. laws (although, **Artist In Residence** laws actually benefited art-dabbling school teachers and affluent dilettantes far more than creative artists) – living quarters, for idealistically-motivated younger men and women who were immersed in any of the creative arts, began to be priced out of their reach. The result was, that New York (and possibly cities

nation-wide), much as Paris (for the very same reason) ceased to be the breeding ground for a meaningful avant-garde. The environment that had advanced the creative arts was being replaced by one that is solely motivated by the making of money.

*

*[From a still-apt cartoon from an earlier time:
A New Yorker is being confronted on a dark street by a crook.*

Crook: “Give me your money or I’ll blow your brains out.”

New Yorker: “Go ahead and shoot. In New York you can live without brains, but not without money.”]

As the 1980s wore on, the chance to get rich quick became the magnetic force attracting a multitude of folks to the city with far-from-visionary ends in mind. In addition, there was the arrival of the children and spouses of the well-heeled butter-and-eggs men from the burbs – and well-beyond, who came to the city to play at being artists. And, it was those folks, along with their never-worked-a-day-of-their-lives offspring, who were to take over the reasonably-priced apartments, lofts and working studios of those creative folks who had been responsible for giving New York its thirty-plus years of post-WWII innovative energy.

[In Tribeca (a real-estate designation for the **TRI**angle **BE**low **CA**nal street) any space vacated (through the removal of creative artists by financial enticement and legal process) was soon taken over by Park Avenue, playing-at-being-an-artist slummers and movie makers, along with their well-paid employees. In East Village (a recent real-estate upgrading designation for part of the lower East Side), between the building of student residences and classrooms by NYU, and the buying out and ousting of long-term tenants to house the rich kids of rich parents, the last bastion of creativity is fast losing its vestiges of

Bohemianism. And, SoHo and the upper West Side have long since become victims of well-to-do, middle-class gentrification.]

Of course, rich or poor, it's nice to have money. But, it's the unrestrained greed that's so wrong. It's the unwillingness to give others the chance to earn a decent living that's unjust. And, it's because so many of those folks (like the baby Bushes) who now have wealth, have no idea how to earn a living, that they try so hard to maintain their wealth – by hook, crook or by supporting the tax breaks for the wealthy as proposed by America's conservative-of-their-wealth Republicans.

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Collateral Damage

“Never tell the truth when a lie will suffice.”

By the turn of the millennium, Victoria Brent had become that woman of a certain age, a little on the plump side, and still (with the help of well-applied cosmetics and hair coloring) somewhat attractive – in an ASPy-beige sort of way. She had a modest college education and an equally modest talent as an artist – yet, has acquired an enormous drive to succeed – which, in retrospect, she probably always had.

It's been most challenging to write a story about Victoria Brent – not because she's a congenital liar, but because of

the convoluted manner in which she went about performing her deceits. It's quite obvious, if one gives it much thought, that she spends long hours planning such doings. Of course, it's always possible that she was totally unaware of the difference between fact and fiction. Nevertheless, one couldn't help but notice that, as a means of proving the veracity of her mendacious and usually self-serving comments (which, all too often seemed executed with spiteful intent), she drizzled little islands of what normally passes for truth.

Victoria Brent's facade, being that of an innocent naïf, tended to delude both friend and foe alike as to her unrelenting drive – which was to be a somebody in the world of art – by any means necessary (which, by itself, wasn't all that uncommon an attribute – it's shared by many wannabe-famous, would-be artists – and other folks as well). And, should her intended ends coincide with those of others (who accepted her claims of being a strategist of the first order), her mendacity was not only ignored, but was often knowingly encouraged. However, in accordance with Lincoln's observation, soon only the most naive amongst her peers were fooled all of the time. Even her one-time supporters came to realize that her penchant for lying, often also spouted to their detriment (as a preemptive strike to quell any negative comments they might voice about her – or to further her career), continued well-after their common goals were either attained or frustrated.

*

Unwarranted ambition is what the lady, Victoria Brent, had. She used her being an ASP (~~Anglo-Saxon-Protestant~~) as a tool: stressing it as a means of proving just how liberal she was – for not taking advantage of it. Meanwhile, she still expected special treatment due to her being one (not an uncommon trait). Had she been an outgrowth of the forties and fifties instead of the sixties and seventies, just being an

ASP would have sufficed (perhaps, even in New York) to facilitate her fulfilling her ambitions.

She'd frequently state emphatically what was patently untrue, or at the very least what had questionable veracity. On the other hand, when stating something that was more or less true (though invariably trite), to stress its import she'd preface her statement with a request that you promise not to repeat it – to anyone. Often, what she said was merely a question of her stretching the truth – but to such an extent, that what she said was, at the very least, doubtful. At other times she made statements that Nance knew to be flat-out lies. However, even after Nance came to realize that there was a pattern to the many inconsistencies between the truth and what she said, they seemed, at least early on, much too trivial to affect his overall good opinion of her.

What happened to cause Victoria's disagreeable personality traits to surface – full-blown? Just what was it that finally exposed her as an unprincipled, only-too-willing-to-slander schemer? What caused her knee-jerk, falsifying reaction to the same sort of reversals that come gratuitously to all of us (whether or not we're particularly ambitious) when dealing with the inherent uncertainties associated with day-to-day communal living? It would be too simple to say that by her resorting to a lie, she could accomplish her claimed-to-be-art-based ambitions. Although, her being aware of her shortcomings, skill-wise, intellect-wise and personality-wise, no doubt, made her realize that fulfilling her ambitions couldn't be attained by going about it in a straightforward manner.

*

Victoria said little about her childhood. But, over time, Nance gleaned that she had grown up in a small town near

Burlington, in Vermont; that her father was a doctor, and her mother a horoscope-casting school teacher and that they were intelligent and independent. They belonged to that secure-in-their-right-to-be-an-American, liberal class: the sort of Vermonter (a poor relation of that cross between an upstate New Yorker and a New Englander) that, when applied to them, the negative inference of the term ASP did a disservice. Her parents were non-church-going nominal Protestants who, if not for the unwanted hostility they could have expected from their neighbors, they'd have admitted to being Atheists. Nevertheless, they still expected a certain degree of respect from those later-arriving non-Protestant, non-Anglo-Dutch migrants to the Promised Land – though, not near as much as did their claiming-to-be-liberal progeny.

*

Shakespeare's introduction of Iago, with his crafty and deceitful makeup, served well as a means of advancing his plot – and the bard's being a super genius allowed him to give the world a full-blown character with universally-despised traits – with the use of but a relatively few lines. In addition, in every ancient society, the world over, pharaohs, rajas and emperors, as well as religious zealots and charlatans were instructed by their mentors to embrace such and similar sinister means for their personal advancement (which occurred for millennia preceding the advent of the brilliant but obsequious Machiavelli's pernicious advice to his Italian lordships). Nevertheless, authors, no doubt, will continue to create characters with such traits, ad nauseam, well into the future. Being aware of this, one might reasonably ask: What possible reason can this author give for adding one more story that includes such a character? And, even allowing for the fact that Victoria Brent gave every indication that at heart she was a very warm, liberal and caring person (and, to a measurable

degree, she really was), albeit, with a penchant for lying, there would be no reason to give such prominence to the lady – except for the lasting results of one of her more vindictive lies.

*

It's hardly a rarity for folks to resort to lying when denying their involvement in what might be considered socially-unacceptable behavior, of one sort or another. And, of course, it's routine for one or both parties to a legal controversy to lie – after all, judges routinely advise jurors to ascertain the truth of sworn testimony when determining the validity of a defendant's or prosecutor's claims in criminal cases – or that of the litigants in civil disputes. But, the routine, everyday practice of lying by Victoria Brent, an otherwise seemingly naive and caring person was a puzzlement to Nance. So, to satisfy his inquisitive nature and, since he was not aware of what traumatic happenstances (or genetic inputs?) may have contributed to, or been responsible for, the conflicting traits she displayed, he let his mind wander back to when they first met.

<>

It was during the early 1970's, as Victoria Brent was being introduced to the senior members of a certain organization's Board of Control (she had been one of the four students mandated to serve on the unpaid governing body of a well-known, membership-run, now-in-decline, once-major art school). She appeared to be in her late twenties; was on the plump side (it gave her a well-fed and cherubic look) and, due to her having fairly regular features, was almost pretty. But, despite that, she totally lacked that universally-considered something called sex appeal. Nevertheless, some thirty years later a mutual acquaintance (an American hyphenate with South-European ancestry) confided in Nance, that he fantasized about

having an affair with her – he found this fairly-cultured, ASPy-looking, AARP-aged woman, to be sexually desirable – go figure.

In time, Nance was to meet her husband, Anthony, who came across as being three or four years her senior. And, much like Victoria Brent, nee Victoria Jones, he was a little on the pudgy side – and both had that beige coloring so typical of so many Anglo-Americans. Upon the first meeting, they exhibited an unpretentious friendly air: that of the much under-rated artist, Norman Rockwell's middle-class characters from middle-America – as seen on the depression and war-years covers of *The Saturday Evening Post*.

Though in the early 1970's, Victoria Brent surely displayed some of that solid, American middle-class quality, as Nance came to know her better she came through as a reserved, lady-like version of one of the artless, tender and affectionate, liberal-minded flower children. Meanwhile, Anthony, who was overloaded with pro bono work, turned out to be as one with those out-to-benefit-society, altruistic lawyers who had sprung up in America during the late 1960's. A generation earlier, given his intelligence and the preferential treatment his background would have earned him, he'd have, no doubt, become a typical corporate attorney.



The problem seemed to come out of nowhere. It was at a weekly Board meeting held in early 1973, when the then director confronted its members with a ten-page document, telling them that by their signing it, which he said was a mere formality, the Vietnam War veterans attending the school would be able to qualify for that era's GI benefits. Nance (who was himself an ex-soldier) had insisted that each Board member receive a copy of the document before

any consideration could be given to its signing. After much hemming and hawing, this was done. And, upon giving the document a thorough reading, it became apparent that the school, in order to be approved for Nam vets, would be required to become a grade-giving institution – which would have changed its very nature – one that gave the organization its unique character. There was a kicker in the fine print of the document, and that was, that the director and his assistant (who was not an artist) were specified by name, as being the ones who would determine the art qualifications of potential students. The majority of the Board's members, after refusing to sign the document, informed the director that they would vote to accept, tuition-free, any Nam vet who wished to attend the school. Despite this, the director, upon being denied the Board's approval of the document, advised those members rejecting it, that they would be replaced – and he had the proxy votes that would enable him to do just that.

[Although the president of the organization is the head of the Board of Control, which hires the director – since, at the time, the director controlled the proxies – it was the director who picked the president and all the Board members. It was to counter this obvious abuse of the democratic process, that an absentee ballot has been recently incorporated into the organization's constitution.

[It should be noted – that SKUNK, along with many instructors and former board members (which included a recent president of the organization) were outspoken advocates of that amendment to provide an absentee ballot for the organization's entire membership.]

Before the then-director could fulfill his promise to not support them with his proxies, Nance, Victoria Brent and her husband, Anthony, worked together on an amendment

to the school's Constitution: The amendment called for an absentee ballot to be sent to all members; this would have effectively curtailed much of the director's authority (it would have made the proxy vote he controlled superfluous).

In the weeks before the vote that could have incorporated the amendment into the constitution, Victoria Brent, unable to stand up to the director's harsh attacks at the Board meetings, stayed away – leaving Nance to steer the Amendment through. At the member's yearly meeting, the Amendment received a majority vote, but not the seventy-five percent required to change the school's constitution.

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It was some time after the voting took place that Victoria Brent advised Nance, that she had alerted a cultured, wealthy benefactor and former Board member of the membership-run organization who had Jewish ancestry, that the director was anti-Semitic (a term, so overused, that it's lost much of its original, rooted-in-nineteenth-century-Germany significance). Nance had dealt with the man for almost four years; he was a politician, and like all politicians, he was, no doubt, aware of the make-up of his constituency – but anti-Semitic? – no way. It was obvious that she was getting even with the then-director. For Nance, this was the first sign of her vindictively-motivated lying – which he came to realize, was just a knee-jerk reaction: one she would always resort to when reacting to adversity. But, this time it was to have a lasting effect.

Shortly thereafter, the then-director, before he retired, in order to prove that he wasn't anti-Semitic, used his control of the proxies to elect a president with an obvious, ethnic Jewish (non-religious) background. Some six years earlier, Nance had run a life-study, sketch class in his studio. The man selected to be president: a retired roofer who had profitably bankrupted his business, came by with a friend

one evening to attend the class – with them came their wives. Perhaps, since neither showed any evidence of having talent, the ladies (who sat at the back of the studio, knitting the entire time) thought the men's interest in drawing from the nude had little to do with their acquiring a knowledge of anatomy and the workings of the human body. This man who was selected to be president, was living proof of the fallacy that, if not for anti-Semitism, all Jews are would-be Einsteins. He was a calculating, ambitious man with limited intelligence – who had no concept of what art was about.

Upon the retirement of the former director, a compassionate, intelligent, slightly anti-Semitic woman (an Italian-American, non-practicing-Catholic from New Jersey), was hired as his replacement. The new president hired her under pressure from the departing director: who believed that she would insure his receiving an uncontested life-long pension – one that he truly deserved (but was, nevertheless, within a few years, drastically reduced). As is the wont of most folks who wield some degree of authority, their values are based on the scope of their knowledge and vision. And the values of those two folks: the then new president and the then new director (both with lower-middle-class values) were applied to the running of the school. And the school, which had already been in decline as a respected, artist-run, professionally-oriented organization, never (despite a more recent failed attempt) recovered its early-on stature.

*

These two, whether for misguided economic reasons, jealousy or ignorance, denied scholarships to talented young art students – unless they also “volunteered” to work in the cafeteria. In addition, having no awareness of principle, a succeeding non-artist president, a retired

successful businessman, to increase the school's income, allowed yearly membership fees (totaling the amount normally paid over the ten years leading to life membership) to be paid in advance – which negated the expectation that life membership inferred a ten-year involvement, as an artist, with the organization.

Furthermore, probably due to the then-president's business background, as a means of bringing in even more money: retired dilettantes; shrink-sent neurotics; visa-wanting youths and not so youthful; hobbyists and going-no-where, life-long students were encouraged to attend the formerly profession-oriented organization's art school. In addition, conditional donations were accepted from well-to-do dabblers which offered scholarships to students involved in anything but painting. None of this, however, was intended to foster attendance by poorer New Yorkers – those art-minded youths who would benefit most from learning the less demanding techniques, before going for the whole enchilada. Instead it encouraged dabbling elderly ladies and gentlemen (who could have attended classes at any of the Y's found strewn throughout the city) to play at being artists and become members. It seemed to many that the inmates were taking over the asylum.

What with the then trend towards an acceptance of the concept that everything and anything is art – and that unbridled greed is good, it would be difficult if not impossible to determine to what degree Victoria Brent's penchant for lying had on the deterioration of this particular art school. But, it sure as hell accelerated it.

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Tribeca – 1980's (oil)

XII

In Gold They Trust

*The only thing wrong with socialism is – it doesn't
work.*

If it did, there'd be no need for it.

*

Marx and Engels got it all wrong.

*Religion is not the Opiate of the people – it's their
LSD.*

As an Atheist, the writer has great difficulty in comprehending the ethics that accept as moral the self-righteous nonsense spouted by the supporters of a born-again Christian Fundamentalist like Bush little; or that of al-Qaeda-supporting, born-again Muslim Fundamentalists and Israel-can-do-no-wrong, born-again-Orthodox Jews. Currently, all of those folks, while claiming that their backing is in defense of claimed-to-be, religious and ethno-national interests – go about justifying what would otherwise be considered murderous doings. This, by maintaining that they're sanctioned by their One-and-Only-God.

In addition, there are the West's oil interests and Judeo-Christian, former-liberal Neocons – both claim God's backing for the instituting of a New World Order: that euphemism for neo-colonialism, which allows for the exploitation of the people and economies of militarily-weaker, non-Euro-Caucasian-dominated lands.

Surely, killings by those practicing any religions must not be excused – though they were often in retaliation for coercive actions by Judeo-Christian and Moslem proselytizing invaders. Though greed is the actual motivation for all folks who attempt to steal the lands of others, it seems that only the followers of the One-and-Only Monotheistic God claim that their doings were not only legally authorized by their God, but moral too. While other invaders seem to rationalize their murderous, greed-motivated conquests as the right of might – and occasionally in defense of their God.

[This One-and-Only Monotheistic God's singularity and omnipotence was first known to have been proclaimed by the short-lived Pharaoh, Akhenaton: an historical figure (whose real existence preceded by centuries that attributed to the mythological Egyptian, Moses). It was Moses who is said to have received the decalogue-bearing tablet(s) from God, which he is said to have conveniently destroyed. And, what boggles the mind, is that even intelligent, worldly folks claim to believe all this stuff. Go figure.]

Those folks responsible for bringing about WWII (the major Axis powers, the bad-guy transgressors) claimed no authority from a Monotheistic God to rationalize their greed-motivated, murderous, land-grabbing, racism-rationalized doings. The good guys from the West, on the other hand, claimed that God was on their side (with the Pope being castigated by the West for saying nothing and remaining neutral – and Stalin's Atheism, in the name of expediency, ignored). This they did, as they went about self-righteously denying the right of any peoples (except if sponsored by one of the West's Judeo-Christian, God-fearing, gold-worshipping nations) to acquire any new lands by conquest.

With the end of WWII, Godless, land-grabbing, Nazi Germany had rightly assumed that God-fearing, capitalist America would turn on Godless communist Russia. And the vile but brilliant Anglo-racist Churchill was to insure that a war (albeit, a cold one) between the West's capitalist-dominated democracies and the Soviet Union would persist. This, he helped to accomplish with his invention and publicizing of the concept of an Iron Curtain – which was intended to insure that any social benefits thought to be accruing to the dispossessed in the USSR would not infiltrate Western culture. In this way, this good-guy authoritarian could help to insure that the money-based, class distinction between the West's middle-class-to-poor masses and the well-heeled, well-born would be maintained.



With the cold-war defeat and dissolution of the Godless Soviet Union, the lands previously conquered by Russia (as they routed the German army) were soon to be set free of communist rule. Much as greed and fear of Russia motivated the proletariat in the various soviets to accept communism, greed and fear of the Russians motivated their conversion to a free-enterprise capitalist system. The possibility of their acquiring the same goodies that the West claimed all of its people had and wanted, was dangled to the masses in those once communist-ruled nations. To satisfy that hunger (their earlier greed-motivated conversion to communism, having proved fruitless), they attempted to show themselves worthy of sharing in the West's goodies.

Along with their now-public and much publicized worship of one or the other of the West's versions of the Judeo-Christian, One-and-Only God, the citizens of those freed-of-their-domination-by-Russia nations willingly gave up much of their once-so-important-to-have independence.

Why? To gain the goodwill of the Anglo-American West, those newly freed nations (along with other poverty-stricken, needy or greed-motivated, insignificant nations, whether or not with a democratically-elected government) slavishly, much as they had obeyed the dictates of Soviet Russia (or the British Empire), complied with the demands of America's most disturbingly undemocratic administration (and England's tagalong, misnomered Labor Party).

Those now claiming-to-be-free nations were to offer up, in an uncalled-for war, anywhere from a token few, to a couple thousand of their citizens as cannon fodder. This, as a means of helping the Bush-administration's former and future, oil-industry executives give the appearance (a fraudulent one, at that) that the invasion of Iraq was moral and had universal support.

And so, we see that the tagalong members of the *coalition of the coerced* do whatever is required of them – by their new masters. Much as Europe's earlier colonizing nations had rationalized their killing of each other and attempts to steal the land of others by claiming that they had a God-given right to do so — so do the West's new aggressors (those champions of a New World Order). No longer, as was the case during WWII, is it the Atheists who are stealing the land of others and murdering those peoples whom they consider a threat to their ability to establish their concept of what a new world order should be. By the turn of the millennium, the God-fearing men and women of the two former dominant Allied powers along with their former enemies and their victims, were to become the new aggressors. The One and Only Monotheistic God does, indeed, work in mysterious ways.

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Greenwich Village – 1970's (oil)

XIII

“Ma, why don’t Jews just act like everyone else?”

[From an Atheist’s point of view, the rationale for the Christian population of Germany, as led by the madman Hitler, for their psychopathically-motivated, partially-successful attempt to mass-murder an entire segment of Europe’s population, whom they deemed unfit to live, had its roots in the Bible (though, much as many Bible stories, similar tales obviously originated with pre-Hebraic peoples). Two of the stories said to have been recorded by those seventy Greek Rabbis come readily to mind. One of those tales is the circuitously self-serving, account of the massacre of all Jewish babies in order to kill off the baby Moses (as a means of denying, even if only a myth, his being an Egyptian?); the other, that of the people of Sodom and Gomorra, who, for their engaging in sexual practices considered so sinful, suffered the wrath of the very same God worshipped by all the current followers of the various and sundry Judeo-Christian and Moslem religions – whereby the cities and all their people were destroyed. (Although the Gods of people following most other religions have had equally horrible acts claimed to be authorized by Them – their Gods are apparently not currently being brought into play.)]



In the immediate aftermath of WWII, the Allies felt they had good reason for not making public, until well after the defeat of Germany, the horrors perpetrated against Jews, Gypsies and other folks whom the Germans deemed undesirable. The logic was, that if the extent of the bestialities committed by the Germans were publicized, the cry for retribution would have been so extreme, that Germany, economically and politically, as a nation, would have been completely destroyed. In which case, the capitalist West would have lost what they believed to be the most formidable deterrent, Germany – as a buffer state to prevent the spread throughout Europe of Russia’s communism-based, militarily-enforced power.

[History tells us that since the end of WWII, America has all-too-often supported despotic governments as a means of stifling those democratic movements thought capable of jeopardizing the interests of capitalist-dominated societies. America was instrumental in ousting the duly-elected, liberal Salvador Allende as President of Chile, and helped install the murdering dictator Ugarte Pinochet – who was every bit as vile as Saddam Hussein. And, earlier, in Iran, America instigated the ousting of the duly-elected prime minister, Mohammed Mossadegh, and replaced him with Mohammed Reza Shah: a controlled-by-the-West’s-oil-interests monarch – whose ignore-the-poor policies allowed for the installation of a Moslem Fundamentalist government – which the oil-controlled Bush administration threatens to attack and destroy. Similar motives have also led to such doings as those of the Reagan administration’s involvement in the infamous “Iran-Contra affair”.]

When first divulged, the horrors committed by Germany, as a result of their mindless hatred of Jews, were rightly considered to be of a magnitude far-greater than those equally-horrific acts committed against the also-despised Gypsies, and physically- and mentally-impaired German

Christians. At the same time, many Americans determined that their very own anti-Semitic leanings may have, at least to some degree, contributed to a rationalization by Germany's Christians for their commission of what was to be called "the" Holocaust. And, in later years, Israelis were to play on that guilt-borne sympathy of America's Christians – as well as the guilt-borne empathy of America's Jews (for their not having been subjected to the horrors of the Holocaust), as a means of getting both political and economic support for Israel (which, all too often, meant support for that nation's self-serving, questionable doings). In addition, the caveat for anyone who didn't support the activities engaged in by Israel's leaders – even when they went about fulfilling their promised-land-based, expansionist objectives – was that you're an anti-Semite – which, in turn, seemed intended to imply that you supported Hitler and his final solution.



Prior to WWI, Nance's mother had come to New York to study; college for woman was far more accessible in America than in Europe. She had had a typical upper-income, middle-class, European education, in that she could speak, read and write English, French, German and, if different, the national language – which, in her case, was Dutch. In New York, his mother had a distant relation who was connected with Columbia University, and through him she attended a gathering where she met Nance's father: an educated, high-caste (Kshatriya), Indian-born Hindu – who was ten years her senior. The only language that they had in common was a very-British English – but it was sufficient. And soon, they were to marry.

The unanticipated degree of the animosity resulting from Nance's parents' marriage was that in time his mother was disinherited, disowned and excommunicated by her Dutch-

speaking, Amsterdamer, Orthodox-German-Jewish parents. All of which made her ambivalent about her religious identity. As a consequence, Nance's parents agreed to bring up their children sans any meaningful religious indoctrination, leaving it up to them, when as adults, to make their own decision (his father agreeing, as long as all his children bore names that identified them for having his Indian heritage).

While his father was alive, Nance's mother lived the life, as well as she could, of an Indian wife. After his death in the mid-1930's, the children, with no Indian community in New York, and having no where else to go, adopted the lives of typical Americans – as Agnostic, non-practicing, non-denominational Protestants (the religion of the family's closest Indo-phile friends being Dutch Reform). With their father gone, theirs was no longer a tea-totaling, vegetarian household. Instead, beef, lamb, pork, chicken, veal, bacon and liquor (though moderately) were consumed – and at Christmas time, a tree was trimmed and presents were then exchanged.



In early December of 1947, Nance (Nansink) Tagore, having been discharged after completing the terms of his enlistment as a private in the US Army, which included his serving a year in the Occupation of Japan, arrived back home in New York. It was during his stay in Japan that Americans were being made fully aware of the extent of the atrocities committed by the Germans against Jews. As a consequence, since Nance had no way of knowing what caused his mother's changing attitude about Judaism – he was somewhat bewildered by it.

After WWII, and the subsequent dissemination of the horrors committed against those Europeans with Jewish ancestry, Nance's mother, despite the racist-based, Old

Testament-rationalized, mean-spirited doings carried out against her, her husband and their children by her Orthodox Jewish parents, experienced an upwelling of compassion for the plight of all Jews. (However, much like a goodly number of well-to-do European Jews, none of her relations had been subjected to the horrors of the “final solution” – all, except a half-sister, who had converted to Christianity, had left Holland prior to the German occupation – ending up in either South Africa or Switzerland.) The other possibility accounting for Nance’s mother’s change of heart, was the resurfacing of a dormant belief – that which was based on a childhood indoctrination: one that had taught her that she was indeed one of the chosen. And, as a consequence, she empathized with “her” people who had been subjected to Germany’s horrendous doings. And that it was her guilt for having avoided death (much as do so many survivors of such disasters as earthquakes and plane crashes), that caused her to inwardly re-identify herself, at least to some extent, as a Jew.

During WWII, Americans had been bombarded with a constant flow of stories extolling the wholesale killings of “Nips” and “Krauts” – and those decrying the atrocities committed by them. The mass media had been applauding the heroic deaths of a million Russians for defending Stalingrad; the incendiary and blockbuster bombings by the Allies that killed thousands at a time were being praised – as was the use of incendiary and atomic bombs for killing and maiming hundreds of thousands of Japanese civilians – for its supposedly having saved the lives of millions. All told, over the course of less than a decade, the violent deaths of some fifty million people had been publicized. As a logical consequence, Nance had become indifferent to the thought of death, and he (as were most Americans at the time – no matter what their religion or ethnicity) was somewhat apathetic when made aware of the full extent of Germany’s depraved *final solution* doings.

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Before enlisting in the army, at 39 Whitehall Street, all that Nance ever heard his Jewish and Christian acquaintances claim, was that Jews were no different than other people – which coincided with what he had observed. So, one day, shortly after he returned, and while talking to his mother, she brought up the subject of the horrors inflicted against Jews. Besides having been bombarded daily, prior to his stay in the army, with wartime headlines announcing the deaths of countless numbers of peoples, the world over – by the time Nance was eight, his father had died and his four-year-old brother had been run over and killed. As a consequence, Nance shrugged his shoulders and told her, only as a smug, know-it-all still-but-eighteen-years-old could: “Everybody dies.”

His mother, obviously annoyed: “Yes, but it’s how that counts.”

“Maybe so,” Nance countered. “But what makes the death of Jews different from that of everyone else?”

She gave no direct answer, but instead said: “Jews are different – they are the spice added to an otherwise bland world.”

Due to his having lived in the city all his life, Nance had known quite a few Jews. And, since he hadn’t noticed anything especially different about the Jews he knew, retorted, a touch derisively, “Well, I don’t know exactly what you mean by that. But, if the actions, which you say give a zest to the lives of non-Jews, are so resented, why don’t Jews just change their ways? Why, if they’re going to live amongst non-Jews, should those aggressive Jews persist in deliberately doing what’s considered objectionable by society, in general – which includes a heck of a lot of ethnic Jews.”

Nance's mother responded: obviously annoyed: "Perhaps you're right. But, even when Jews do make an attempt to be like everyone else, they're still resented."

Nance paused for a moment, and then, seeing the truth in what she had just said added: "Yeah, I saw how a kid from Chicago, with a T-Five rating, got a less-than-honorable discharge from the army. He was serving in my battery – one that was loaded with Regular Army Southerners. He was outspoken, but had done nothing wrong. And, now, looking back on it, it was probably just because he was Jewish – but at the time I thought it was because he was a bit of a wise-ass – OOPS, sorry – wise-guy city kid."

"It may very-well have been a touch of both." His mother then went on: "I doubt if you were aware, that even before Napoleon's opening up of the ghettos, there was a resentment of Jews – but it was probably due more to their being a people living apart from others. After all, until then, religious murderings of one order of Christians by a competing order of Christians was the norm – and any killings of Jews, until the Nazi's attempts at the genocide of all Jews, seem petty by comparison. And that goes back, at least to the crusades. As far as I can determine, modern-day anti-Semitism had its roots in Post-Napoleon-era Europe: the result of Napoleon's having freed Germany's serfs and the opening up of Europe to the occupants of its ghettos. Jews, having been prohibited from owning land, had been living urbanized lives. So, they were better prepared to prosper financially from their freedom. And, of course, both the newly freed serfs and the heretofore uncontested members of the Christian bourgeoisie resented them."

Nance countered: "I've known a lot of Jews who've cursed out other Jews a lot worse than any Christians I knew ever did. Of course, that was during the war: when Jews were

questioning the motivation of Christians for their intense dislike of Jews. They were putting themselves in the shoes of others, and saw stuff that they thought would bother them. That was mainly for their being so competitive – especially in money matters.” His mother made no response, so Nance went on, “I can tell you, physically and intelligence-wise – whether in the army, in school, on the handball courts or on the street corner, I’ve seen no real difference between Jews and anyone else. So, at least in America, why don’t Jews just act like everybody else?”

His mother’s disdainful response was: “Oh! You can’t ask them to do that”



Fuck Barry Fitzgerald

It was early in the fall of 1948, a time when almost everyone who hung out in front of Moberg’s Drugstore had served in the armed forces. They were a motley crew of young men. All the regulars were typical New Yorkers – which meant they lived through (and believed) the WWII out-flowing of the: *We’re All Americans*, patriotic propaganda campaign. Since the carryover effects of it didn’t lose its full impact until the late 1960’s, virtually everyone on the corner, despite their having a miscellany of different ethnic and religious backgrounds, thought of themselves as real Americans: un-hyphenated, flag-waving, non-denominational pseudo-Protestants – at that.

[Veterans with Central African ancestry were not to be found hanging out on the corner. Legally, until around 1954, New York City's landlords could deny rentals to anyone for whatever prejudicial reasons they might have. Although this allowed for discrimination against all those thought undesirable, and virtually all ethnic, religious and racial minorities, unless quite wealthy, were considered undesirable as tenants by one or another hyphenated group of real-estate interests, it was most pervasively used against Negroes (and, if a non-Negro wanted to rent an apartment in a rent-controlled building and didn't offer a large-enough, under-the-table payment, the owner would just claim that they didn't wish to rent to: whatever minority group the applicant was thought to belong to). Half a century after landlords lost their right to arbitrarily discriminate, de facto segregation of the races (by charging exorbitant prices for the purchase or rental of apartments) persists – albeit, the result is considerably less exclusive. In more recent times, African-Americans who were richer, better educated and who conducted themselves better than peoples of any other race (not only those token examples of a touted, compassionate conservatism: Condoleezza, Clarence and the good-cop Colin – who have benefited career-wise by having willingly put up with a certain degree of condescension), can be found living in formerly “all-White” communities.]

Prior to and for over a decade immediately following WWII, Washington Heights was the cultural center of the City: Columbia University was the major constituent (although, it hadn't yet, like NYU, become the land-grabbing entity that it has since become). The main inhabitants were college students (at the time, most were vets) and Townies (the group to which those who hung out on the corner belonged). In addition, since the area was safe and had reasonable room rates, it attracted a miscellany of individuals: those from abroad, out-of-town, and the outer

boroughs. One of those out-of-towners was Eben; he came from Washington, DC. His father was a lawyer and an uncle, a judge. He was very bright; verbal; on the short side; had well-groomed, reddish hair; a prominent nose; and spoke with a slight, somewhat nasally, ethnic-Jewish accent. Every so often he'd stop by the corner and make small talk with whomever was present. Despite Eben's coming off as being somewhat condescending, he nevertheless seemed anxious to be accepted. Since one's acceptance was determined by simply standing on the corner, the fact that he wasn't a veteran or a Townie, didn't prevent him (or anyone else) from stopping by and joining in conversation.

During the course of any evening, one or another of the fellows in the crowd would tell a joke. It got so that all one had to do was tell the punch line – which may or may not have drawn a laugh. “Don't make waves!”; “Where were you when it hit the fan?” were standbys.

Then there'd always be a new joke (usually told by an occasional hangerouter) that caught everyone's attention:

“The manager of a theater that intended to put on five Shakespearean plays in succession was in a quandary. How could he list all the titles on his marquee – they just wouldn't fit. So, he hit upon a unique solution. He climbed up his ladder and placed the following letters and numbers on his marquee: **5 Shakespearean Plays: WET; DRY; 4, 6 AND 8 INCHES**. What were the five plays?”

No one knew what they were. And all laughed when they were told: “**Midsummer Night's Dream**”; “**Twelfth Night**”; “**Much Ado About Nothing**”; “**As You Like It**”; “**Taming Of The Shrew**”.

<>

[Over the course of some ten to twenty years earlier, the slums of Brownsville, East New York and the Lower-Eastside had produced a number of Jewish boxers, and Jews in general were proud of their accomplishments. However, much as did (and do) all of America's other hyphenated ethnics, as Jews moved up and out of their slums, they too no longer competed in that brain-maiming, vicious sport. But, the sport persists: it's one of the only means for an uneducated individual from the lowest economic and socially-accepted classes to strive for wealth and the recognition that goes with it.]

One evening, after a few jokes were told, Eben decided to tell one. It probably had Borscht-belt origins – the kind of joke that people tell about themselves. Since there was still the: *we're all Americans* feeling, and the regulars in the crowd included a few with ethnic Jewish and Irish backgrounds, the joke's subtlety was appreciated by all:

“There was this skull-cap-wearing, little, old man waiting on the subway platform. When the train pulled in, and as the doors opened, a drunken Irishman rushed out and pushed past him – yelling: ‘get out of my way – you gadamn Jew.’ As the old man got on the train, and as the doors were closing, he turned and cried out weakly: ‘Fuck Barry Fitzgerald.’”

*

It was while reminiscing about the post-WWII years at Moberg's corner, that the parallel between the *Barry Fitzgerald* joke and the impact of the celebration of Hanukkah at Christmas time became apparent.

In those earlier post-WWII years, Hanukkah was not something that Jews, even if they were aware of its existence, were known to talk about – and none who hung around the corner were known to mention its existence, let

alone celebrate it. It was Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year. And, if one had a Jewish friend who was known to be religious, and you exchanged cards – Christmas cards spelling out “*Season’s Greetings*” might be exchanged, but Happy Hanukkah?

[According to Compton’s Encyclopedia: In early winter, the feast of Hanukkah commemorates the successful outcome of a warlike incident that occurred during the 2nd century BC. Hardly more significant a happenstance, one would think, than the battle won at Yorktown on October 19, 1781, which effectively won America’s independence from England. Yet few ultra-patriotic Americans, if any at all, know the date or are known to commemorate it.]

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Perhaps, in the immediate aftermath of WWII, due to the awareness of the horrors of the Holocaust, those folks who had considered themselves religious Jews (which inferred, that they believed they were indeed God’s chosen people) began to question their relationship to God.

If the Judeo-Christian-Moslem God does exist, and He did make man in His own image, and the beings he gave His semblance to were capable of carrying out the wholesale murder of other folks who were also created in His image – what kind of an all-powerful Supreme Being were they worshipping?

The possibility that their God was non-existent, did occur to some – no matter what their born-to faith. But for Jews, first they were to consider the prospect that perhaps they were not His chosen people; or if they were His chosen people, then their God must be impotent. There was, of course, the one they’d prefer not to openly consider. And, that was: if their God was, indeed, omnipotent, what kind of

a God could stand by while His chosen people were being annihilated? Were the Nazis acting with the approval of the One-and-Only, omnipotent, Judeo-Christian-Moslem God? If so, the thinking went, Jews must have been guilty of the vilest of doings to have deserved the horrors permitted by Him: those inflicted on them – as the depraved Germans carried out their *grisly final solution*. And if that were indeed the case, then Jews were out of their minds for having made a contract with Him: an implacably vengeful God, with Whom no excuses could be made to mitigate the consequences (His use of Satan’s underlings to destroy them) of any alleged transgressions: transgressions made, perhaps as a result of their inability to fulfill their side of their bargain with Him. *(Although this would have made Him into a terrible, malignant force, it might very well have been the one that the Vatican, which, apparently, didn’t make an effort to intercede on their behalf, had pondered.)*

The consequence of all this, was that during the years immediately following the defeat of the Axis powers, Jews, in general, were ambivalent about manifesting any attitudes consistent with their considering themselves chosen people. There were, however, ultra religious Jews who were intent on bearing the cross: that of their being His chosen people. And, they went about rationalizing (for better or worse) the doings, or non-doings, of their God. Meanwhile, most educated individuals with ethnic Jewish ancestry, no matter how flattering the concept, continued to doubt, if not deny, the validity of claims of their being chosen of God. Nevertheless, a goodly proportion of those same folks continued to believe that in some ways, they’re intrinsically better people (morally, as well as in money matters) than others. And, it’s this belief that causes some Jews, who would otherwise be just regular Joes, to press beyond their inherent abilities, in an attempt to excel.

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Although post-WWII hyphen-stressing for Americans began in earnest, nationally from the mid-1960's on, it took a decade or so for New York's bar-scene drinkers to begin to describe themselves by emphasizing their religion, ethnicity and race. For thirty years, or so, prior to this, one's hyphenated-American designation tended to be ignored – or at least not referred to; alcohol imbibing was the great equalizer. Although the fact that drinking didn't bring a complete halt to the stereotyping of bar patrons, if verbalized, it could lead to a fight – and, so, as a rule, it wasn't.

The stressing of their Jewish ethnicity by some individuals from within one small segment of New York's heavy drinkers, appeared to have its roots in a Holocaust-awareness campaign promoted by Israeli-support groups. It's hard to say whether it took hold amongst America's made-guilt-ridden Jewish community (for their: "It's-none-of-my-business." attitude towards the killing of Israeli athletes during the 1974 Olympics – as well as for their not having been directly affected by Hitler's final solution). The other possibility, as many critics of Israel claim – is that the stressing of the admittedly-horrible effects of the Holocaust has become a ploy to rationalize the billions of dollars Israel receives annually from American tax payers.

There was another contributing factor: one that demands an answer to the hackneyed questions: "Which came first, the chicken or the egg? Was it the late-Vietnam-war era stressing by Jews of their ethnicity or was it the reaction by those heretofore ordinary, run-of-the-mill Americans: those with ethnic Jewish forbears, to the resurfacing of dormant, anti-Semitic sentiments: ones that had nothing to do with Israel's apparent subjugating of the Palestinian people and the confiscating of their land – but were attitudes rooted in centuries-old, economic- and religious-based prejudice?

But, regardless of the answers to those questions, the losers from amongst both Christians and Jews, in a symbiotic, self-serving relationship, were responsible for a goodly portion of anti-Semitism: both having relied on it to rationalize their failure to fulfill their expectations. Jews could claim that anti-Semitic sentiment prevented them from fulfilling their God-given potential, and non-Jews could indulge in it by claiming that, if not for the skullduggery committed by Jews, they'd have been successful.



The early arrival of Jews in New Amsterdam (1625-64) was celebrated by New York City's present-day ethnic Jews. However, going back, even further than that and then up to the years leading to WWII, after every conquest of poorly-armed, non-Euro-Caucasian, non-Judeo-Christian peoples by Europe's empire-building nations, small numbers of entrepreneurial Jews (along with any individuals belonging to minorities having no broad-based, political support in a colonizer's home country and no country to call their own), were, when not welcomed, at least tolerated when they arrived in either the colonized or colonizing country. The result was, that some Jews, especially those in England or Holland and their colonies, prospered to the point of being accepted as affluent contributors to the wealth of the colonizer's home country.

All of which puts modern-day ethnic Jews in a quandary. In the past they adopted the social mores of the host nation – usually becoming patriotic citizens of that country. However, they (much as most newcomers of any background) are almost never truly accepted as equals by the dominant population in the nation to which they migrate. So, when Israel was first formed, a majority of

Jews gave support to that nation – but seldom anything more than by purchasing Israeli bonds of questionable worth. If anything, there seemed to be more Israeli Jews coming to America, than there were American Jews going to Israel – which still appears to be the case. However, once the outcome of the 1967 war showed Israel victorious, which seems to have been sufficient for many Jews to maintain their claims to being a chosen people, many American Jews, though still avoiding migrating to Israel, began to evince pride of race (ersatz – at that). And, with the refusal of Israel to return the lands they invaded during that war – which was required according to the laws set up by the formers of the United Nations (done in the aftermath of WWII to prevent a recurrence of the land grabbing by Germany, Japan and Italy) many American Jews began a concerted anti-United Nations campaign.

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[The presence of a Germano-Slavic genetic makeup of Europe's Jewish population makes ridiculous the contention of orthodox and born-again religious Jews that they are the direct descendents of the Bible's chosen people: the Hebrew Semites (just as the presence of the black-haired Goebbels and even Hitler, made ludicrous the claims of a Teutonic master race). Nevertheless, much as the Nazi's convinced the Italo-Austro-Hungarian Germans that they were members of a master race, so too were Germano-Slavs; Black-Ethiopians, Greco-North Africans and racial-hyphenates from around the world, convinced that they were all genetically-connected to one or the other of the ten (Semitic) tribes of Israel – as a chosen people. But all those claiming genetic purity should have kept in mind, that (as previously mentioned) the chances of any one gene being passed on to the ninth generation has been calculated as being one in four-hundred million.]

Prior to the rise of Adolf Hitler, and his designation of Jews as a unique peoples (albeit, derisively), the majority of Jews thought of themselves, more or less, as being just like other people – though for some: chosen by God. Until the latter years of the twentieth century, it was rare, indeed, even in a city like New York, with something like one- to two-million ethnic Jews, to see a man wearing a skull cap. And if one were to exclude the few old, bearded Rabbis and Hasidic Jews – it was even rarer. Nevertheless, due in part to the Holocaust and the subsequent systematic propaganda laid on American Jews by pro-Israeli interests, innumerable “born-again”, ethnic Jews (ranging from rich to poor), having become reassured that they were indeed the chosen people of God – began encumbering their heads with a usually-black, skull cap.

The degree of propaganda disseminated by Israel’s politicians has proven to be so effective, that a number of naturalized American citizens (who as a condition of their being granted citizenship must forego allegiance to any other country), when asked to choose between their allegiance to Israel or America – select Israel. And, that’s bothersome.



There’s no question that the horrific doings committed by the Germans, most notably those associated with the Holocaust, resulted in some of humanity’s vilest. Those depraved actions can only be compared to those committed by the insatiably-greedy and fanatically-religious peoples involved in the building and maintaining of Empire. This, of course, holds true to the doings of all nations that have stolen the lands of alien peoples, whether or not in an attempt at empire-building. Moreover, those actions have almost always been rationalized as being in the name of justifiable national self-interest – and, more often than not,

also ordained by their God. And, so, many of the most horrible events were, and still are, perpetrated against those folks unwilling to succumb to the arbitrary authority of alien rulers.

In the more-recent past, during those years leading up to, and while the Holocaust was being carried out by the hate-crazed Germans, millions of non-Euro-Judeo-Christian peoples were being victimized by the Allies' empire maintainers. Prior to and during WWII, England, along with the Dutch, French and Belgian governments (even when in exile) were sanctimoniously rationalizing their inhumane doings, as being necessary to fulfill their Judeo-Christian God's ordained taking-on of the "*White Man's Burden*."

[It should be noted that (despite the claims by liberal clergy) there is an implied racism inherent in the Old Testament (The Book). And, it's still very much a part of all strict Orthodox and Fundamentalist Judeo-Christian religions. As a result, their created concept of God's will continues to be used by fanatical adherents in an effort to strengthen the support of their wavering believers – and as a rationale for racist-based, religion-rationalized murdering. (This is not to say that race wasn't or isn't an issue in other major religions)]



In New York, annually, from mid-November to New Year's Eve, just about every form of mass media carried advertising campaigns intended to encourage the free spending, in the name of Christmas, on non-essentials. All sorts of merchandise that was suitable for gift-giving: toys, jewelry, wearables, edibles, readables, mailables, laughables and you name it, were touted.

Perhaps with the intention of preventing the loss of the unquestioned backing of America's ethnic Jews, the Israeli

government constantly stressed the Holocaust to them. As a result, due to some sort of a questionable, circuitous line of reasoning, they felt they'd be in denial or cowardly if they joined in the celebration of Christmas. However, the vast majority of America's Jews, much as all Americans, no matter what their religious beliefs or disbeliefs, were also caught up in all the Christmas hullabaloo – which made it imperative to buy lots of stuff and things as gifts.

Of course, all of this gift-giving had to do with the celebration of the designated birthday of Jesus. Though scores of millions of Americans: non-religious Christians and Jews; Atheists; Agnostics; Muslims; Buddhists; Hindus and you name it, did not participate in the spiritual aspects of the festivities associated with His birthday, they just ignored them and participated with their Christian fellow-Americans, in the secular aspects of the celebration of the believed birth of the Son of their God — not so, the parents who were born-again Jews.

In order to counter the negative impact on their children's reinstated belief in their chosen-of-God status (which had them asking: "If we're chosen, how come we don't get gifts?"), they elevated the importance of Hanukkah. And, by doing so, gave themselves an excuse to give their children gifts.

[It should be noted, that in the years leading up to, during and for over a decade after WWII, a goodly portion of those folks taking part in the merriment associated with Christmas were not born, or even reborn Christians: they were folks who had (despite the crassness of its commercialization) succumbed to the feeling of warmth and good cheer that surrounded the celebration of Christmas. For Atheists, Agnostics and other non-believers, it seemed that the only time Christians were more-or-less uniformly

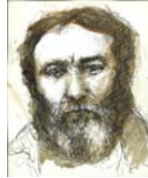
acting the way they claim Christians do, was when they were celebrating the assigned birth date of the Son of their God, Jesus.

[It might be interesting to contemplate the fact that, in America, Atheism has a number of non-believing followers comparable to that of many of America's Major Christian religions. Moreover, the number of non-believers is more than equal to the total number of those Americans claiming to be Moslems, Jews, Hindus, Buddhists, Animists. Moreover, since avowed Atheists tend to be an intelligent lot, their joining in the celebration of at least one aspect of Christmas tends to have a unifying effect on the nation as a whole – at least during the days immediately surrounding the birthday attributed to that of His Son.]

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Using the *Fuck Barry Fitzgerald* joke to illustrate just how ridiculous and ineffectual the upgrading of Hanukkah into a major Jewish holiday is — as a way for born-again Jews to counter the powerful influence of Christmas on their children — might seem, at first, far fetched. But, it boggles the mind to think that any intelligent Jew really feels that this minor celebration of a battle won, Hanukkah, can be considered of sufficiently great importance, so as to be equated with the universal impact of the world-wide celebration by billions of Christians and their well-wishers, of the ascribed birthday of the Son of their God – a day that has fostered an outpouring of some of the West's greatest music, literature and art.

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XIV

Nehru, The New York Times, The Creed of Greed, Neo-Colonialism

&

The New World Order

In the past, while painting, the writer had developed the knack of shutting out the commercials, if and when listening to WQXR, the once-esteemed classical music radio station of the New York Times. However, the commercials, over the years, have become so blatantly intrusive, that they're now near impossible to ignore. After having been made so aware of the advertisements, the writer concluded that there were few, if any, restrictions placed on the products and services offered – or the manner in which their announcers present them. One of the most egregious examples of the Times' attempts at increasing its bottom line was that of its allowing a saccharine advertisement by a mattress retailer to use words praising its wares in song – to the melody of Brahms' Lullaby. Money, money, money, despite the past accumulation of considerable wealth derived from the publication of its newspaper, seems to be the main consideration of its owners and their hirelings – another is the dissemination of an undeclared agenda – which is a whole other matter).

By itself, the Times' stress on the bottom line isn't anything special. It's just part of the greed-is-good mentality that has become so pervasive – worldwide, but especially in

America, where the avarice capital of the world, New York City, leads the way. And, if not for the fact that the same radio announcers huckstering so many of those intellectually-demeaning and bordering-on-the-truth ads (usually in a most highfalutin manner) also announce and describe the great classical music of the past, there'd be no problem – all it would mean is that the owners and management have succumbed to the current credo: that the covetous shall inherit the earth.

Since the desire to get super rich at the expense of others is shared by a broad cross-section of the nation's people, that the owners and employees of the Times succumb to the needs of greed, rather than the need to present an unassailable semblance of intellectual integrity, shouldn't surprise anyone. But, the way they've gone about it on WQXR, cheapens the musical experience for all those not fortunate enough to have, as an alternative, their own collection of recorded classical music. Moreover, it acts to confirm the opinion of most intelligent listeners that the Times has recently added being indiscriminately money-grubbing to its agenda-driven, occasionally-hypocritical presentation of the news. The result is, that in the publication itself, well-nigh every one of its collateral features – from economics to cooking to its crossword puzzles – and on through just about every book review and special article, have become suspect.

It's why they hire, and continue to employ a writer or editor, that is most telling about the dictates of the Times's agenda. Of course, the owners and their chosen management, have every right to state their views. The problem one has with the Times is, because, as a newspaper it's considered, worldwide, an icon of rectitude, its agenda-driven holier-than-thou assertions come through as duplicitous. One readily knows, when one reads the Wall Street Journal, what they slant and why they slant the news

the way they do – but not so the Times. Intertwined with some excellent coverage of the news and often insightful and intellectually stimulating articles, one finds evidence of its insidious agenda (ombudsman or no ombudsman). And, that's the reason so many folks not in agreement with, or not brainwashed by it, fault what in so many other respects, is a superior newspaper.

The coverage of the news by New York's other dailies seems so biased, that its factual content can't be trusted. And if and when an intelligent person reads one of those papers, they take everything written with a handful of salt.

As does this and all other SKUNK publications (SKUNK, of course, likes to think that its agenda is to tell the unvarnished truth), all publications have an agenda. If they didn't, there'd be little reason for an amendment guaranteeing freedom of the press. And, though the Times, in the past, had an agenda, it appeared to be motivated by a desire for truth – admittedly a subjective matter, at best. But, it was not sneaky about presenting it. It was not a form of brainwashing, nor did it appear to be an overly secretive propaganda machine. Perhaps it was that in the past there were a number of good (and many not-so-good) newspapers on New York's newsstands. Nowadays, there's not one large-circulation, general newspaper being published in the city that has either the will or the status to counter any of the veiled, biased assertions found in the Times. The most troubling aspect of its agenda is its hypocrisy. In dealing with racism, it claims (rightfully) that this is bad – but it also claims that old-fashioned, racist-based, imperialist colonialism was good, and so too is its doppelganger: the New World Order's neo-colonialism (with its intrinsic Euro-Caucasian, Judeo-Christian bias).

The happenings in West/East Timor and in Palestine/Israel were skewed by the American media, as a case of Judeo-

Christian good guys versus Moslem, racially-different bad guys. In one instance, it was a question of gaining the support of America's Catholics for the re-colonization of Portugal's *possession*, East Timor, (accomplished with the military support of the Australian army and the moral support of non-OPEC, oil interests). In the other, as a means of appeasing America's born-again Jews and born-again Christians, the media is going about brainwashing the nation's gullible others, into supporting the re-colonization of Palestine – the Promised Land, as authorized by the Judeo-Christian version of the One-and-Only God.

In recent years, the same media ignored the killings and rapes of untold numbers of Black Africans by other Black Africans of competing tribes (whether or not missionary-made Christians, Animists or converted to Catholicism by Belgium's colonizers). And, now, totally shocked, those same media folks publicize daily, the rapacious doings against Black Moslems by Arab Moslems (who are actually hired by a Black Moslem government). All of which is being done in an obvious attempt to gain the support of America's Blacks for what most Americans have come to realize was nothing more than an uncalled-for Anglo-American war against Islam — motivated by access to cheap oil and enhanced by an appeal to America's war hawks, and religious and race-based bigots.

[One need only consider what took place in the former Yugoslavia: it took over a decade before the moralizing Judeo-Christian West made a concerted effort to stop the subjugation and ethnic cleansing (murder) of multi-thousands of Moslems in the formerly de facto autonomous province of Kosovo, where they were the majority. And even then, no land to call their own (as was done for the acknowledged injured party in East Timor) was turned over to the Moslems.

Moreover, although in the past, throughout Europe, boundary disputes between Catholics and Protestants were settled as a result of the stronger killing off the weaker (then stealing the loser's land – a practice not unique to Christians or Europeans), this has not happened during the recent conflict in Northern Ireland. Why? Because, neither party could gain the degree of moral support from the Euro-Caucasian, Judeo-Christian world that would have allowed for one of them to carry out the required mass killings that would have enabled the settling of the issue.]

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One would think that by January 11, 2004, the New York Times would have changed its pro-British, colonialism-boosting policy. It hasn't. Once considered a conservative paper, the Times is now damned for being too liberal by conservative Republicans. America, in the first years of the turn of the new millennium, has moved so far to the right that the still-conservative editorial policies of the Times appear to be leftist. *[And, that sure as hell tells you in what direction the nation is heading – and the results of the 2004 presidential election confirms it.]*

Anyone who's read the Times over the years (in the case of the writer, one of the many papers he's read for well over half a century) is aware that, although it has much to offer in the way of factual information, its agenda has not changed much, if at all. So, no one should be surprised, when the paper chose a person named Ian Buruma (a man with an apparent Anglophile's self-serving, distorted and superficial knowledge of India) to review a biography by Shashi Tharoor: "NEHRU – The Invention of India".

Either due to his ignorance, or a deliberate bigotry-based, Anglophilic distortion of the facts, the reviewer, Ian

Buruma, denied Shashi Tharoor's assertions of British complicity in whitewashing their massacre of a thousand, unarmed civilians at Jallianwala Bagh (in the city of Amritsar).

[Having heard so many contradictory accounts of just what the massacre by the Brits at Jallianwala Bagh was all about, in the mid-1990's the writer began an intensive two year investigation of it. The factual aspects of that research were included in his 1998 novel: "Topsy Turvey – The Irony of it All"; his thoughts being, perhaps, as a segment of a novel, the horrors of it all, could be best conveyed. Then, in 2002, due to a conservative America's neo-colonialism aspirations – under the guise of establishing a New World Order, he extracted the documented segments and included them in a 112 page booklet: "KILL-KILL-KILL – The Massacre at Jallianwala Bagh".]

In 1919, the Brits had welsed on their tacit agreement with Indian leaders, such as Gandhi and Jinnah, which was, that in return for their support of England during WWI (which resulted in the death of 70,000 Indian troops), India would be offered Home Rule (similar to that previously granted to the predominantly Anglo-controlled colonies). Instead, the Brits, who obviously never intended to honor the agreement, passed a degrading law, the Rowlatt Act – which made Indians subject to the judgmental whims of even the most minor British official – and allowed for the arbitrary imprisonment of any Indian deemed potentially dangerous to the British occupation. (In comparison, it makes the Patriot Act seem like a piece of liberal legislation.) Within months of the end of WWI, England had, in advance of its passing the racist and insulting-to-the-Indian-people Rowlatt Act (the passage of which brought about the civilian disorders which the British knowingly caused), stationed troops near areas most apt to show resentment for its enactment.

In the city of Amritsar, the British arrested two prominent Indians: one Moslem and one Hindu, who were leading peaceful demonstrations against the enactment of the Rowlatt Act. It was in response to these arrests that a meeting was held at Jallianwala Bagh (a large enclosed, open-to-the-sky area), where estimates of anywhere from as few as six thousand to as many as twenty thousand unarmed, seated (Indian fashion) civilians were in attendance.

Without warning, British troops under the direct command of a British general stationed themselves at the entranceway to the Bagh (garden), and began firing. Since there were only a few very-narrow other means of exit, the sneak attack resulted in some one thousand deaths and the wounding of a thousand more of those unarmed civilians: Hindu, Moslem and Sikh men and boys. (After first attempting to deny, and then play down the extent of the massacre, reluctantly, the British finally owned up to their having wantonly murdered 379 of those 1,000 civilians who were ascertained, by independent sources, to have been killed.)

When the British General Dyer was finally, after a year of procrastination, brought to account, he was quoted as saying that, had his troops not run out of ammunition, he would have ordered them to continue firing. At which time, this general, who was directly responsible for the murders, was commended for his actions by England's House of Lords – and a major London newspaper garnered today's equivalent of a million pounds in contributions for him (as a maligned hero) from a grateful British public.

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One wonders whether this Buruma fellow, the reviewer who defended and justified the massacre overseen by the deranged General Dyer, by claiming that he was reacting to civilian disorders (the term applied to a common occurrence throughout the now-praised era of Pax Britannia), had acquired his bias from watching the beautifully-photographed, well-acted, historically-superficial, commercially-oriented movie, “Gandhi” – with its pleasing-to-the-Western-moviegoer version of how the Mahatma went about ridding India of England’s military occupation. In the movie, the massacre at Jallianwala Bagh was depicted more as an interrupted picnic, than as the horrific act it was.

If not for the review having been published in the ever-so-respected New York Times, it would hardly be required to chastise the reviewer, *Buruma*, for seeming a bigot, or give the devil his due, an ignoramus, who went about rationalizing the massacre and denying colonial Britain’s racist policies.

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In recent years the world has witnessed innumerable rationalizations of horrific doings, e.g.: the massacre of over seven thousand Moslems by Christian Serbs at Srebrenica, as Dutch peace-keepers were said to have stood by; and, the hateful (claimed by its murdering perpetrators to be retributive) attack of 9/11 by fanatical Moslems on New York’s World Trade Center. Even rationalizations and outright denials of the proven calculated killing of multi-millions of civilians (Jews, Gypsies, the sickly and others) who were considered unfit to live by Nazi Germany, can be heard. And, one shouldn’t forget the rationales for the killing of Palestinians protesting the taking of their land by Israel’s Bible-quoting, religious fanatics.

Although the racist-motivated, years-long, unlawful internment of some six hundred, non-Euro-Caucasian prisoners of war in Guantanamo (Euro-Caucasian prisoners of war are routinely treated in accordance with the articles of war – not so these folks), might seem slight in comparison to the other horrors, when one considers that this is being performed, and then justified by the representatives of a nation once considered the ideal of the free world, it is significant.

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The majority of well-informed Americans had hoped that what was occurring at Guantanamo was but an isolated lapse of judgment by a Republican Congress and administration that were (at the very least) incompetent – and that the American people would never support such doings. However, they were mistaken. Xenophobes, racists and religious bigots from America's South and Midwest, while hypocritically claiming they were acting in support of moral values, cast their votes en masse — which worked to tip the balance — and have the country retain a plutocratic Congress and a bumbling, religious fanatic for President. (That their doings have the support of a few knee-jerk, right-leaning members of the Supreme Court – only adds to America's plight.)

It has been determined that the likes of the horrendous activities carried out at Guantanamo, were also being carried out, on a large scale, in parts of Iraq, as well as in Afghanistan. These doings have been tacitly, if not overtly approved by an administration dominated by born-again-Christians, oil-interests and Neocons (those claiming-to-have-once-been-liberal Democrats — now members of an off-branch of the Republican right).

The resurrected, pre-depression-era Republican party has regained its earlier domination of Washington. In doing so,

they jettisoned those more recently acquired liberal-Republican members (winning the electoral votes in those states where they held sway was iffy, at best). Concomitantly, they went about: catering to the bigoted-racist and -religious interests of voters in the formerly-Democratic, still-somewhat-segregationist Southern states (many of which have large Fundamentalist Christian populations); convincing many American Jews of their having a more pro-Israel stance than the Democrats; appealing to the racism-based xenophobia of middling middle-Americans; satisfying the greed-based self-interest of fearful-of-losing-their-wealth incompetents; persuading a few African-Americans that they're not really racist, due to their hiring of a few to fill high-profile, government positions – and, last, but not least, maintaining the support of its I'm-the-only-real-American, die-hard Republican base.

[It should be noted that amongst those Bush voters in 2004, there were also some who came from America's still unloved minorities. Unless greedy or numbered amongst the very rich, it's obvious that by their voting for Bush they believed that they could shift the race- religion- and ethnicity-based bigotries away from themselves – and to the Republican's newly-made pariah people (in this case Moslems).]



The editorial staff of the Times, by their having chosen Ian Buruma to review the biography by Shashi Tharoor: “NEHRU – The Invention of India”, indicates the paper's continuing bias. After all, it should have been a foregone conclusion that the reviewer would go about rationalizing the premeditated murdering by the Brits of those thousand, seated, unarmed, Indian civilians at Jallianwala Bagh.

Moreover, one doubts if a review that mitigated the blame for the Holocaust or for the enslavement of African slaves, due to their attempts to stay free, would have been printed.

The British had relied on the use of the most advanced weaponry to maintain their relentless, merciless control of a colonized people and their nation's economy. The world is very much aware of the atrocious consequences of Germany's short-lived colonization of Europe; whereas, the horrendous results of Britain's militarily-enforced, mercantilism-based disenfranchising of the Subcontinent's impoverished-by-them people – which caused some twelve to thirteen million Indians to starve to death (this during just the last fifty years of the Brit's occupation of India) is totally ignored.

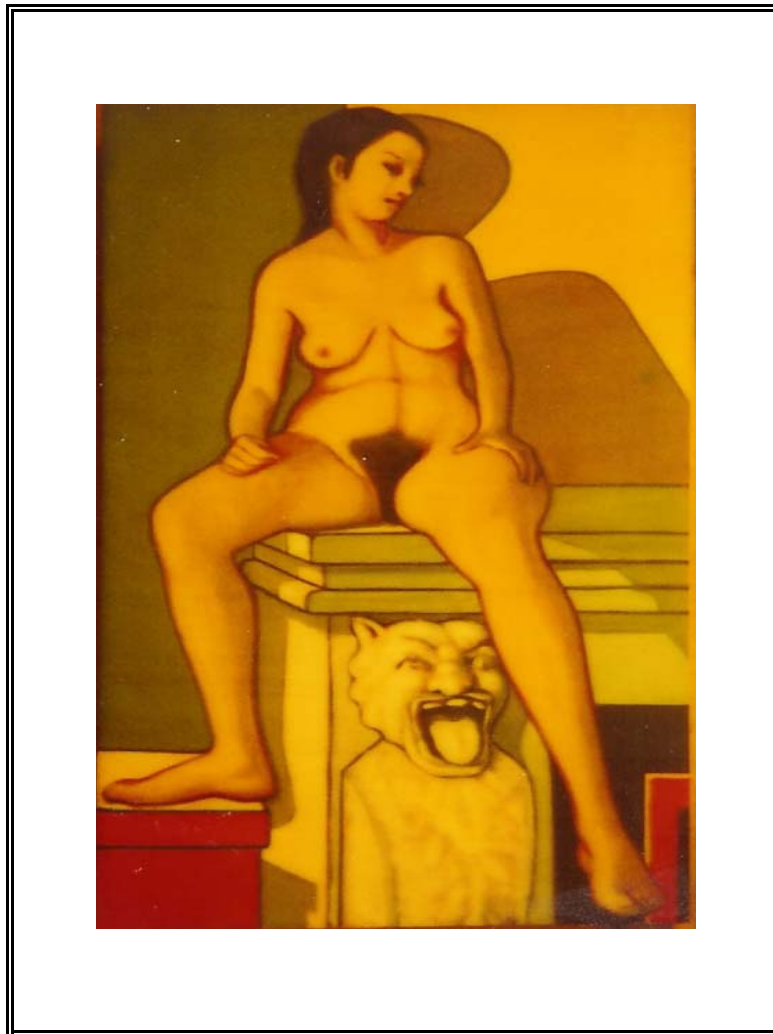
All of which makes the reviewer, Ian Buruma's use of colonial-Britain's, proven-to-be-false, and self-serving rationalizations for their despicable activities leading-up-to, during and after the massacre of April 13, 1919, at Jallianwala Bagh, quite understandable – if one assumes that the reviewer's readings on the subject were limited to the kind of cleaned-up version of history that a schoolboy in England, or a missionary-educated Indian would be taught.

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Bigotry-based rationales, though not restricted to history books for children, have been made to cosmeticize the most horrendous deeds: this, from time immemorial, and it continues to be a worldwide phenomenon. So, condemning the reviewer as a one-of-a-kind ignoramus or bigot would be wrong: the reviewer of the Nehru biography is just one of the run-of-the-mill, rationalizing-supporters of Euro-centric, racist-based colonialism – and probably a proponent of the “New World Order”.

The New York Times is a heavily edited publication – and the editors of the Book Review have more than ample time to give every article sufficient scrutiny. Though it's now thought by many to be a liberal newspaper, as a result of its allowing the rationalization for the massacre of some thousand Indians to pass without comment, it belies such a consideration. The Times is merely an advocate for the worldwide, Euro-centric, Judeo-Christian, religious and economic domination by the West's multinationals: aka the, Neocon-backed, *New World Order*.)

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Nude on the Mantle – 1980's (oil)

XV

The Connoisseur

On many an afternoon my friend Mohan and I (both, at the time, fairly healthy septuagenarians) would share a pot of ginger tea as we sat at a somewhat-rickety table in the Samovar: a post-Raj, coffee shop cum snack-food restaurant facing the rear garden of the Chatrapati Shivaji Museum. The restaurant, early on, had been a low-key, inexpensive hangout for Indian artists and their ilk. Though it's now far from cheap, it's still low key and quite-reasonable – at least by Western standards. It owes its continuing popularity to its location; it's situated on the ground floor of the focal point of Mumbai's art scene, the Jehangir Art Gallery: a complex of excellent exhibition spaces: the largest being a squarish room that serves as an auditorium – as well as a gallery for group and one-person shows; the works exhibited range from that of rank amateurs to that of accomplished artists – and more recently along with a plethora of mediocre work by Western artists. Adding to the Samovar's success, is the fact that it has no competition (price-wise) – within a half-kilometer radius of the gallery, restaurants catering to the five-star hotel crowd both Indian and foreign, are now in the immediate vicinity

(and, besides being more formal, their prices are higher than the overwhelming majority of South Mumbai's gallery-going crowd are willing to pay – or capable of paying).

While drinking our tea (which had been served in a metal pot along with a small pitcher of boiled milk and an anachronistic, Raj-type tea strainer – no tea bags here), Vivek Roy, a tall and relatively-fair-skinned gentleman stopped by the table. I was later informed by Mohan (a former cameraman) that he and Vivek (a onetime producer and director) had worked together in “**Bollywood**”: a bastardization of the name of the city where America's movie industry flourishes – and, which is self-deprecatingly applied to India's major film-making sector located in Mumbai (formerly **Bombay**).

With Vivek were two men – one a fragile-looking elderly man dressed in white pajamas (India's traditional, hot-weather attire that's been adopted by the West for use as bed-wear) and the other, a middle-aged man wearing simple, Western summer clothes. Although both spoke English fairly well, Vivek (who, much like my friend Mohan, spoke perfect English) did most of the talking. In retrospect, I realize that Mohan, at an earlier date, must have told Vivek that I was an artist – because, no sooner were introductions made, than he brought up the subject of a painting that they'd recently purchased. It soon became apparent that he and his companions wanted confirmation that ownership of the work could make them rich – or at the very least, they wanted my opinion as to its market value (though not necessarily its artistic worth). Although I'm only a painter, and make no claims to being an authority as to the valuation of artworks, curiosity got the better of me. So, after advising them of my lack of expertise, which they ignored (due to my friend's touting my knowledge of art, in general – or, more probably, because all Westerners are

assumed more knowledgeable on just about every conceivable subject, than any resident Indian), I willingly accepted their invitation to see the painting.

With little ado, all of us left the restaurant and entered a late-model Maruti, the car was an accomplishment (with Japanese guidance, if not control), of India's very own screwdriver-utilizing, manufacturing industry. We arrived at our destination within five minutes after leaving "Kala Ghoda" (the plaza which the Jehangir galleries faced – and which, during Raj-time, contained a statue of a Brit on a "Black Horse"). Alighting in front of a small snack-food stand located on a crowded street in back of the Taj and near the Colaba Causeway, we made our way through a narrow passageway – and up a steep but short flight of stairs. There, we entered a room: well lit but quite small (it measured little more than two by three meters). Strung along its length was a small table topped by a color TV, a plastic chair and a cot on which a framed, under-glass painting had been placed upright. Facing this were four chairs and a small stand. There were no windows in the room, but an A/C was on the entire time we were there.

As we entered, I paused to glance at the painting – and my worst fears were to be realized. Despite the reflection and glare on the surface of the glass, the painting, with its crackled surface, appeared to be little better than the kind of mass-produced schlock churned out a hundred years back by poorly-paid and not overly-skilled European craftsmen (much like the cheap paintings dumped in America from around 1960 on – which was after the rigid requirements for duty-free entry of original works of art were dropped – and those came from Europe, followed by an influx of hackwork from Korea and then Southeast Asia).

*

On the side opposite the entranceway was a closed door – and it was from there that the art dealer, Anil Mistry, emerged. He was dark, stern-faced, solidly-built, about five-and-a-half-feet tall and spoke English quite well. After greeting me, and assuming that I was a potential customer, he extracted a stack of Rajistani-type miniatures from a cabinet, gave them to me and proceeded to give me a sales pitch. Vivek Roy then spoke to him in Hindi, apparently advising him of the whys and wherefores of my presence – after which Anil Mistry immediately changed his attitude – and became the perfect host. He had an assistant (who remained on call in the adjacent room) bring out glasses and a bottle of Directors Special: a cheap but acceptable Indian whisky – all of which, plus a constantly-filled plate of crisp, hot papads, were placed on a small table that was, due to the size of the room, convenient to everyone’s reach.

During the small talk that ensued, I was advised that the three gentlemen who had brought me there had pooled their funds in order to buy the painting in question. At the time I was told that it cost them five lacks – and, in January of the year 2003, that was roughly equivalent to ten thousand US dollars. (A week later, Vivek Roy ran into my friend Mohan Jain, and advised him that they had really paid 50,000 rupees – which would have been only about a thousand US dollars. When made aware of that, I was much relieved. They were such decent folks, I’d hate to have seen them so taken advantage of. Ten thousand US dollars is an awful lot of money in India.)

According to an apparently legitimate and old label attached to its back (the painting had been handled more like a watercolor or pastel, than an oil: it was framed under glass with a rigid wooden backing); the work had been framed in 1932 by a company located in Bombay (now Mumbai). My hosts advised me that the seller had told them that the original owners had brought the painting with them,

as a family heirloom, from Ceylon (now Sri Lanka) to Bombay, where they had it framed. To me, the work had appeared, even under glass, to be nothing more than run-of-the-mill hack work (at best, a bad imitation of a knockoff of a minor Boucher, Fragonard or Watteau). And, so, I was reluctant to request the obvious – which was to have the painting removed from the frame, thereby enabling me to actually see what it really looked like, and make an honest attempt to determine the texture of the paint, the condition of the crackle and the skill of the brushwork. But, so sure was I that it was merely an amateurish and incompetent rendering on nothing more than black velvet, that I stated emphatically that by exposing the painting to the air, it could very well adversely affect its value – which got me off the hook.

As we proceeded to finish off the bottle of Directors Special, I proceeded to voice the most non-committal appraisal of the work that I could – without resorting to the use of outright lies. I made mention of the fact that many of the best works are known to develop crackle as they age – but deliberately avoided mentioning that crackle is far more often evidence of the painter's incompetence, than evidence of a great work of art. Although it was somewhat more difficult to refrain from telling them that it appeared to have been painted on black velvet, or that the drawing was amateurish, the design banal and the color weak – I unashamedly did.

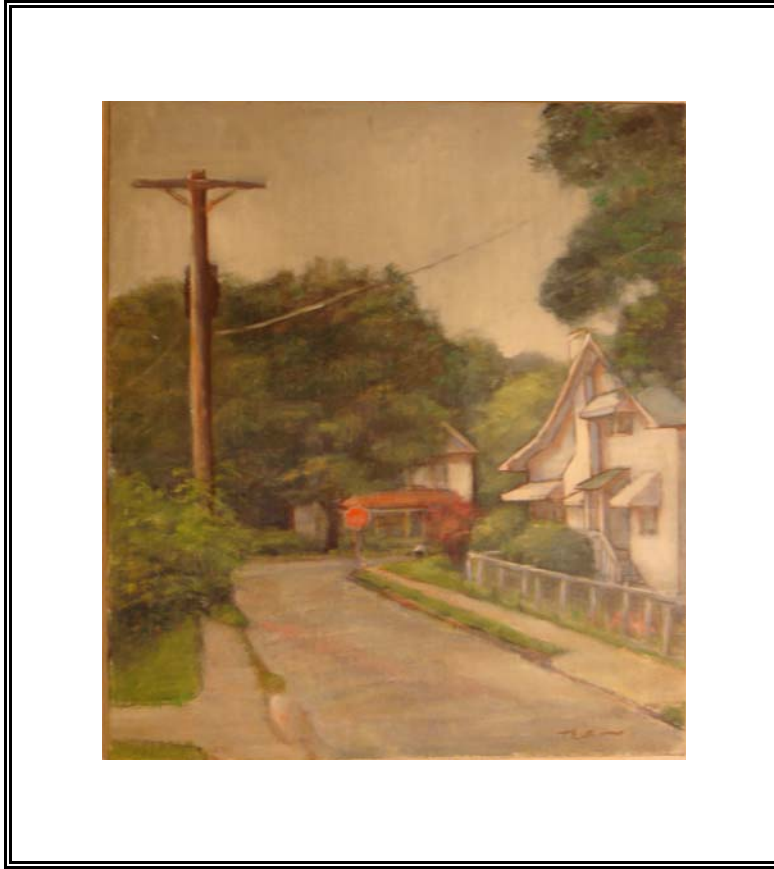
As we drank, the fragile gentleman in the white pajamas mentioned that it should be worth a lot because it was an antique. He mentioned something about a million – even if he meant rupees and not dollars, it would be twenty thousand US dollars – but, at the time, I was sure he meant dollars. Whether it was due to the way the money would be divvied up, or from a past encounter, the younger man and the art dealer, who were drinking a little heavier than the

rest of us, began a prolonged and rancorous argument. Which, because it was in Hindi, I couldn't figure out why. But, it did put an abrupt end to the stay.

*

A few months later, shortly after my return to India, as Mohan and I walked along MG Road, a sleek, black, limousine pulled up alongside us. The windows were lowered, and from within – looking very prosperous, was Anil Mistry along with Vivek Roy and his two friends. All waved and shouted greetings to us – and before we had a chance to utter a word, their chauffeur-driven Mercedes Benz shot off in the direction of the Taj Mahal Hotel

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Greensboro, NC – 1980's (oil)

XVI

(Part I of: A SKUNK Special - originally published – July 4, 2002)

Enron-Gate & The Bubble

The Economics of Greed 101

Why have so many Americans, but especially middle-class workers, lost all or a major part of their savings – when it was invested in a retirement fund? After all, they had been promised huge returns on their socked-away-for-a-rainy-day nest eggs, if they put it in stocks – rather than in government bonds, money-market funds, savings accounts and their ilk.

It's hoped that this experience puts to rest, forever, the notion that it would be a good thing for social security moneys to be invested in the stock market – either by buying shares in specific corporations, or through a mutual fund. It now appears that, in either event, by doing so, it would be tantamount to allowing a wolf pack to shepherd a flock of sheep. But, Bush and his fellow Republicans are [still – in 2005] intent on doing just that.

The easy response to the simple question being posed: Why the loss? – would be: The value of the stocks purchased by

those responsible for managing the workers' savings, declined precipitously. However, perhaps the question that should be asked is: What caused the steep drop in the value of their stocks? This would warrant a more satisfactory response. And, an attempt to do just that will now be made. Two of the main reasons for the loss in value of their savings are fairly obvious:

One cause is a broad-based reduction in the demand for, and the subsequent loss of value in the technological innovations produced by those corporations in which their moneys were unwisely invested.

Though it's true that virtually all middle-class youths are, or will eventually become technologically savvy, there's still a limit as to just how much money, time and energy they and their parents are willing to expend on the latest minor (though, always claimed to be major) electronic-, telephonic- and computer-related touted-as-being-a-must-have contraption. *Even in a doohickey-loving country like Japan, the market for the latest gadgets, of one sort or another, eventually reached a saturation point – all of which added to the causes of that country's decade-long, on-again, off-again recession.*

These days, when folks in a consumer-driven economy cease to buy the latest must-own gizmo (at its manufacturer's projected rate and price), whether as first-time buyers or to replace an older model, it's bad news for its manufacturer (and the value of its stocks) – as well as for everyone involved directly and indirectly in the production, distribution and selling of that gizmo. And, although it's become the norm to blame the horrific attack of 9/11 for the stock-market's woes, even before that fateful event, there had been a continuous spiraling down of the value of virtually all tech-related (no matter how negligibly) stocks.

Much of the miscellany of said-to-be-extraordinary and ground-breaking programs and contrivances (for which it's always claimed that there's an insatiable demand) had been created by wannabe millionaires to get their naive counterparts: the greedy, get-rich-quick, wannabe entrepreneurs, to buy into the initial public offering (IPO) of their newly-formed corporations. And, this sort of thing was both a symptom of and part of the cause for the stock-market bubble: that tail-end, three-fold increase in the prices of shares listed on NASDAQ – a period when worker's retirement funds were misguidingly (if not criminally) being invested. It was when this bubble predictably burst, that the invested-in-stocks retirement funds lost so much of their value.

A second cause, and probably one of the most significant, is due to the loss of confidence, both here and abroad, in the value of stocks issued by even America's most prestigious corporations: the result of an outpouring of revelations concerning corporate malfeasance, cooked books and self-serving, greed-based decisions – all magnified by the realization that many of those rogue companies had questionable connections to leading members of the Bush administration. *In America, instead of investing in stocks, ordinary folks have turned to investing in real estate and government bonds, or socked it away in a mattress – abroad, many sold or stopped buying American stocks.*

Adding to the lack of confidence by foreign governments and their investors, is the Bush Republican-administration's renegeing on America's past agreements to protect the environment, support the world's justice system, fund efforts to safeguard the health of the world's poverty stricken – and its contradictory positions on free trade (Smoot-Hawley – *deja-vu*, all over again): free trade – bad when rationalizing the protection of favored American

industries – but free trade is good when protesting the protectionist actions of other countries. So, when added to Bush's and his team's involvements in questionable stock transactions and his buddy-buddy relationship with apparently-corrupt corporate biggies, it's no wonder that, when added to the world view (one that's also held by many thinking Americans) we now have an intellectually-challenged leadership – that there's been a loss of confidence in America, our corporations and our economy.

*

There's been, however, a telling input that's added to the precipitous plunge in the value of stocks (especially affecting investments from abroad) that America's media, politicians and racist, xenophobic, flag-waving my-country-right-or-wrong patriots turn a blind eye to – and that's the war-making activities of the Bush administration. Throughout the world, especially in Europe, Japan and the now-and-formerly-colonized nations — death-and-destruction has been, and still is fairly commonplace. So, for their citizens, the deliberate killing of innocent civilians had become an accepted fact of life. As a consequence, despite their having deep-felt sympathy for those thousands killed, and all their families, that resulted from the barbaric attacks of 9/11, many formerly pro-American foreigners began to question America's massive retaliatory military response – some claiming that America overreacted. To them, the punishment didn't seem to fit the crime. At the time, the conclusion by many was to assume that Bush must have had an entirely self-serving reason for magnifying the danger coming from a relatively-minor terrorist organization (the one actually responsible for the horrific attacks of 9/11). Moreover, as the facts seeped out, it became apparent that the ability of Al Qaeda to carry out the suicide attacks by those demented religious fanatics, though considerable, had far more to do with the blunders

of the CIA and FBI, than to the organizational skills of the terrorist organization. Evidence appears that had they acted with due diligence – the assault would have been stopped in its tracks.

*

Moreover, it should be noted that due to the Bush administration's resorting to a xenophobic, cowboy cum lynch-mob approach towards all thought-to-be Moslems or those with Muslim names (no doubt, if still alive, that real patriot, General "Omar" Bradley, would have been suspect), as a means of countering the threats of terrorist attacks, the Republicans may very well have, inadvertently, greatly increased the number (worldwide) of sympathizers with Al Qaeda – thereby making it into a far greater terrorist threat to America and the non-Moslem world, than if a holistic approach – one with a long-term potential for peace – had been taken.

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Sculpture's Studio -- West SoHo -- 1980's (oil)

(Part II of: A SKUNK Special - originally published – July 4, 2002)

Current Events 101

The Politics of War

*Though likelihood for war and peace,
is often ever present,
And peace on earth acclaimed in song –
It's war that gives us glory.*

And it covers up a politician's goofs and dirty doings.

It's not until a potential enemy is totally dehumanized, that the citizens of a basically-moral nation can go about killing them. And, to do so, both Bushes accomplished just that by catering to the worst traits: xenophobia and racism, of the followers of the most reactionary branches of the my-God-is-the-One-and-Only-God, Judeo-Christian religions. As a result, some billion of the earth's peoples, the Moslems, are in the process of being dehumanized and segregated from the rest of the world's citizenry – although, they worship the very-same God. And, if that were the end of it – it would be bad enough. But chances are, that even if that vast majority of Moslems who've always been peace-loving, remain so, there will continue to be, at the very least, a small yet significant minority who will never accept the real, or inferred humiliation caused by their having a peace brutally forced upon them (deemed a good or bad trait, depending on which side one's on). Now, then, it doesn't

take a seer to realize that, if, as it's beginning to appear to some, there really is an ongoing, militarily-enforced, neo-colonialism-type of reoccupation of Moslem lands, then, what may today only include a silent minority of Moslem sympathizers, will most assuredly turn into a vocal, and potentially violent majority who will be hostile to the West – as well as hostile towards all non-Moslems.

And, so, should an attempt then be made to totally segregate all Moslems from the rest of the Western world (which appears to be taking place – in a xenophobia-oriented effort to counter the potentially-violent activities of but a fairly small number of organized fanatics) – it must be kept in mind: that Islam is an all-inclusive religion. Moslems, much like the scattered, disparate followers of many of the older religions: Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Judaism (despite nonsensical claims by some of a genetic purity) have [*blood-line*] inputs from people with virtually every major racial background: Indo-, Euro- and Semitic-Caucasoid; Negroid and Mongoloid. In addition, the followers of Mohammed include great numbers of members from virtually all racial and ethnic subdivisions.

*

So, since it won't be easy (as it was to determine and then segregate by race Americans with Central African origins) to keep track of just who is, and who isn't a Moslem, if the West's Euro-Caucasian followers of one or the other Judeo-Christian religions want to isolate Moslems from the rest of their society, they'll require the assistance of an expert. The most logical way to obtain the services of such an expert would be to follow the example of the cold-war foes: America and Russia (both of whom sought the help of former Nazi-Germany rocket scientists, when competing in their space race). Thus, by hiring one of the many old Nazis who managed to avoid being executed for his crimes

against humanity, they [*the Bush administration*] can garner the know-how of an expert in forcing a despised peoples, in this case Moslems, to wear a yellow Crescent. This, much as he did Europe's Jews – when he, as a Nazi, had forced them to wear a pariah-indicating, yellow Star of David.

*

Samuel Johnson: “Patriotism is the last refuge of the scoundrel.”

Horrific attacks, such as those committed by the terrorists (whether born and naturalized American citizens – or legal and illegal foreign residents) in Oklahoma City in 1995, or in Washington, DC and New York in 2001, must be prevented, and circumstances allowing for their occurrence must be eliminated. Although, there's no question that means must be found to prevent similar attacks from happening again, in no way can the Constitutional rights of America's diverse citizenry be compromised. So, before Congress so willingly authorized a massive, xenophobic, eye-for-an-eye military response (one with little chance of making for a lasting, or even a short-term solution), it should have explored all means of solving the complex problem of how to go about protecting America's citizenry from terrorist attacks – without their being required to live in fear and surrender the very rights that guarantee the freedom threatened by the terrorists.

Should we go about it by attempting to destroy the lives of some billion Islamic peoples (and, along the way turn every Moslem into a potential enemy)? Or, do we do it by attempting to regain America's past reputation as a nation whose citizens try (at the very least) to be fair and, if not loving, at least somewhat respectful of their neighbors –

regardless of their race, national origin, ethnicity, sex, mental and physical disabilities, sexual preference or religion (even if they're Moslems, Buddhists, Hindus, Sikhs, Jains or followers of a miscellany of other non-Judeo-Christian religions)?

*

It's only when traveling abroad that the writer pays much attention to cable TV. And, so, in an attempt to get hard news, he took to watching the stock market reports by an American station's flag-wearing (in every lapel – as if to prove their patriotism to skeptical viewers) analysts, when he was alerted to the fact that five years earlier Bill Clinton was reelected to serve as president. Then, confirming the common belief that CNBC (affiliated with Dow Jones) follows a Republican-no-matter-what policy, the commentator went on to dwell on the Lewinski business. Since it was totally uncalled for, it seemed an obvious attempt by America's agenda-driven, pro-Bush media, to draw attention away from Dubya's, and his crony's financial improprieties. However, it's just possible that Dubya's reluctance to prosecute his Texas buddies for their having cheated stockholders and employees out of billions of dollars was not intentional, but merely due to his administration's general incompetence.

[This article had been written some eight months before the uncalled for invasion of Iraq in March 19, 2003 – and prior to the airing of the Bush administration's far greater misdeeds: the lying,, blundering and mistreatment of prisoners of war and terrorism suspects tantamount to war-crimes.]

Although, there's absolutely no question that America is obligated to prevent both organized terrorist and sicko-individual attacks against her people and property, one has

to wonder if Bush's eagerness to engage America in a massive, no-win war: one that at best could result in a series of Pyrrhic victories, wasn't, at least in part, motivated by an attempt to muddy the waters surrounding his involvement with the folks at Enron (as well as those of his own insider trading – when a board member for a Texas-based oil company).

War is an action a moral nation should engage in only as a last resort. Presidents with a statesman's ability, have managed to keep America out of aggressive, massive, no-win, military action. In more recent times Carter, Reagan and Clinton were capable of doing just that – in addition, it should be noted that despite any shortcomings, they managed to maintain the nation's image as one with a basically-decent people.

Since one would assume that even an incompetent leader would have made an effort to bring about the end of terrorism without the never-ending, eye-for-an-eye retaliation now being engaged in; it might very well turn out that it was Dubya's involvement (along with that of top members of his administration) in potentially shady, if not downright crooked dealings (and not only those concerned with Andersen and the run-by-Bush's-buddies' Enron) that played a far greater part than the horrific attacks of 9/11 in causing the loss of those trillions of dollars on the stock market – with its consequential toll on the retirement savings of some millions of American workers.

*

It must be noted, that although it's been determined that the Democratic candidate for vice-president, Senator Lieberman had questionable ties to the accounting industry – the overwhelming majority of those involved in the shady, if not downright crooked dealings were Republicans.

The Teapot Dome scandal, as was the Iran Contra affair and Watergate were also the doings of the moralists of the Republican Party.



Now, then, impeachment proceedings had been brought against then-President Bill Clinton for not admitting to having had an extramarital affair with a consenting adult. Yet, in no way did Clinton's sexual peccadilloes bring any harm to the American worker (unemployment was way down and the value of his retirement funds was up when Clinton was in the White House). Moreover, despite the vicious partisan attacks on the then-presiding-president Bill Clinton, American prestige, worldwide, remained high – not so today with Mr. Bush and his Republican administration in the White House. Never before in American history has there been a time when the nation's reputation, as a moral force (though, admittedly, not always fully deserved), been so degraded.

[Keep in mind that this article (except in those few instances, as indicated), was written some eight months prior to the actual invasion of Iraq – on 3/19/03.]

Perhaps, one shouldn't bring up Dubya's and his administration's failure of intelligence (no pun intended) to uncover the plot for the horrific attacks of 9/11 – so, in an attempt to be completely fair, we'll ignore the fact that it was during his watch that it occurred. And, instead, let's concentrate on his handling of the "War on Terrorism" and his administration's hand-in-pocket familiarity with the honchos of the Texas energy-supplying organizations:

- America is now involved in an ever-growing, seemingly-impossible-to-win semi-declared war.

- Foreign nations, and their investors are fearful of just what the Bush administration's overall agenda is in fighting his "War on Terrorism" – they also have big-time doubts as to his competence as a world leader.
- Tax breaks are being proposed for the wealthiest, while a recession is hitting the poorest Americans – which adds to the growing disparity between the very rich (most of whom funded Bush's and the Republican party's election campaigns with mega bucks) and all the other Americans.
- While the value of the shares owned by the rich is being protected by laying off (in a continuous stream) untold thousands of working stiffs – additional hundreds of thousands of others are losing their jobs in those corporations directly and indirectly affected by the Enron-cum-Andersen scandal (now joined by other once-prestigious companies – due to their similar crooked dealings).

All of which has led to the loss of faith, by stockholders worldwide, in the integrity of corporate America. And, as already mentioned, it's the consequential reluctance of foreign nationals (whose purchases had, in the recent past, been partly responsible for maintaining the prices on America's overvalued stocks) – to buy into American corporations, that's partially responsible for the loss of part, when not all of the life savings of hundreds of thousands of America's middle-class workers.

[Two years had elapsed since this article's original writing, before Dubya's buddy, the CEO of Enron, was finally indicted. And by the end of 2004, the dollar had lost a third of its value in relation to the euro. This, enticed European investors to buy up American stock, real estate and US Government bonds on the cheap – which has worked to

maintain their value (at least dollar-wise) – and is why Bush has not, as yet, bankrupted America.]

So, why, I asked myself, shouldn't George W(hoover?) Bush et al, the cause of much of (*middle-class*) America's loss of prosperity and worldwide loss of respect – be brought to task ?

Along those lines, here are some of the questions that SKUNK would like answers to:

- Will Enron's dress give the telltale evidence of its having had an illicit affair with George W. Bush – in the White House's Oval Office? – when the Governor of the Lone Star State? – when on the oil corporation's board?
- Will George W. Bush be asked, on Public Television, to state categorically whether or not he had ever engaged in an illicit relationship with Enron or any other real-estate, ranching or energy-related corporation – in or out of the Oval Office?
- Will George W. Bush be subpoenaed by the US Senate to tell the truth and nothing but the truth about his involvement with Enron?
- Will the US Congress spend fifty million [*of the taxpayer's*] dollars to delve into George W. Bush's past in order to discern whether or not he had had similar, illicit, self-gratifying dealings with other energy multinationals – besides those with Texas-based Enron?
- Will America's anti-union, anti-Social Security, pro-big-business media look into the possibility that George W. Bush was aware of Enron's problems prior to the horrific terrorist attacks of 9/11?

- Were the July 4, 2002 cry-wolf, terrorist alerts publicized by the Bush administration as part of a politically motivated win-win propaganda piece? If attacks occur: “We told you so, and you didn’t heed our warning!” And, if there were no attacks (which was the most probable outcome): “We prevented it!”
- Will the possibility that the numerous, ill-founded, terrorist alerts were made as a means of scaring Americans into adopting a lynch-mob mentality – one that would allow for the rationalization (as ancillary damage?) of the killing of thousands of non-Euro-Caucasian and non-Judeo-Christian innocent civilians?

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Interior – late-1980's (oil)

XVII

Liberals?

Upon Nance's return to New York, after having spent a half-year in India, he was to hear the host of a *liberal* radio station ask for call-ins from Indians and their misnomered counterparts: American-Indians, who would state whether or not the colonization of their homelands was beneficial for their country and her people.

First, it would be difficult to find an Amerind (American-Indian) who believed that their having obtained a job on or away from the reservation (high-paying or not) and the chance to learn the English language, was fair compensation for having had their lands stolen – or for having had fifty million ancestors killed-off due to the presence of gold-seeking conquistadors and yearning-for-land European immigrants. So, by the host of the *liberal* radio station having included Amerinds in a call-in request – can only be seen as a disingenuous gesture, if not an insult..

As to asking India's progeny that same question, it would be tantamount to asking Irish Catholics or European Jews if they believed that the colonization of their homelands had been beneficial to them and their people. Admittedly, there may very well be a few greedy, forgetful, or ignorant Irishmen (after all, Ireland is now a well-off, English-speaking nation) who would respond positively to that

question – even though their response would infer that they believed that colonizing-England’s centuries-long subjugation of Ireland – punctuated by the greed-aggravated starvation deaths of a million impoverished civilians, was a plus for them. And, although Israel’s stress on the horrors of the Holocaust would seem to make it unlikely, there’s no doubt that one could find a few greedy, forgetful, or ignorant Jews who would have answered positively if the host of the *liberal* radio station had asked Jewish-Americans a similar question concerning the benefits accruing to them as a result of Nazi-Germany’s short-lived colonizing of Europe. After all, it did bring about the Holocaust – which, in turn, was the major input into the founding of the Jewish state of Israel. And, Israel, much like Ireland, has become a prosperous nation with a large English-speaking population..

*

Pertinent to the above, at a later date, in response to demands for compensation by those Americans whose African ancestors were sold into slavery by America’s Euro-Judeo-Christians, a man was deliberately given airtime by the station’s moderator. The man, by inference, was presented as a typical, born-after-independence, educated Indian.

When not traveling abroad, Nance, a born and bred New Yorker, tended to listen to this station for its objectivity; so, he was dismayed by its presenting the opinion of the referred-to gentleman as having views representative of all such folks with Indian ancestry. The Indian gentleman had a Portuguese name, which indicated, to anyone familiar with India, that, in all probability, he and his parents were Roman Catholics – probably with Portuguese-Goan roots – which, on the face of it, one might assume, wouldn’t make him anything other than an Indian (NRI or otherwise).

[The term: Non-Resident Indians is a post-colonial designation used to bestow either ridicule or respect (based on the resident Indian's feeling of envy or scorn) on those assumed-to-be disoriented, self-exiled Indians, as well as anyone with Indian ancestry who had themselves, or who had an ancestor who had, migrated from the Subcontinent.]

It was apparent to Nance, having spent, at the time, well-over three years, all-told (over a twelve-year period) traveling extensively in India, and as an American with an educated Indian father (a high-caste Hindu, who, shortly after the turn of the century was to become the founder of some three generations of born-Americans), that the Indian gentleman was spouting typical, Judeo-Christian-missionary-cum-catechismal-Catholic propaganda: which was that Indians were not only sinners, but ignorant infidels – unless or until they were brought the benefits of the West's Judeo-Christian culture.

As a consequence of the Indian gentleman in question having been brainwashed, it should have been a foregone conclusion that he would have made light (though, perhaps due to his ignorance) of the violence and horrible indignities inflicted on the ancestors of African-Americans and Amerinds. All of which had him belittling their right to seek compensation for those past injustices. He then, with some subtle prompting from the moderator (an avowed liberal – who seemed amused by the NRI's kissing-up-to-the-West, with his disparaging view of India and her people) went about ignoring the continuing destructive consequences of those horrible injustices inflicted on African-Americans. He did this by stressing the fact that the survivors of the slave trade had benefited economically and culturally due to their having been exposed to Western society.

[It is the policy of certain modern-day Americans: those once calling themselves liberals, and now, Neocons; along with racist and oil-money Republicans – to maintain that the benefits of colonization for the peoples of non-Judeo-Christian and non-European nations, far outweigh the wrongs committed against them. In the course of justifying colonization and its handmaiden, the slave trade (engaged in by both Spain and England), those folks go about ignoring or making light of the premature deaths of some fifty million Amerinds and the enslavement and deaths of untold millions of Africans (not to mention the “black-birding” of Pacific Islanders).]

Getting back to the Christian-Indian gentleman – it might very well be that he was comparing the condition of India’s far-more-civilized-than-the-colonizers, upper classes and smaller religious minorities who, as long as they were subservient to the will of the British, had received preferential treatment – which resulted in their benefiting economically and education-wise from the colonization of India. Mainly Christians (most being converts from the lower castes), Sikhs and Parsis (plus a number of Armenians, Jews and other non-Indians), were seldom, if ever, directly harmed – and generally benefited, as a result of Britain’s greed-motivated plundering of India’s wealth – and the destruction of her maritime and indigenous-cotton-goods-manufacturing industries.

So, it’s just possible that the Indian gentleman, by ignoring the millions of deaths incurred by his fellow (albeit, poor and non-Judeo-Christian) Indians and the very real and intended destruction of India’s economic and cultural, pre-colonialism past, could assume that the ancestors of Amerinds and African-Americans suffered no worse than many of those impoverished ancestors of India’s people – whom, he was claiming had benefited from their past subjugation by England and Portugal.

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The inducement to Asians to convert to Christianity, was often with bowls of rice — or its equivalent: employment or schooling of sorts. (Missionaries were up to their old tricks. In the aftermath of the tsunami they mixed in a healthy hunk of proselytizing with a little bit of health-help for the unfortunates of Sri Lanka.) An added incentive was given in Goa – which was colonized by the Portuguese during the years when the inquisition was in full swing. There, the cruelty was imposed upon those heretofore non-proselytized Indians who had remained in areas under Portuguese domination – which added to their motivation to convert. And, while England was persecuting Irish Catholics at home, in India they supported, militarily, Portugal’s continuing occupation of Goa – which, in turn, supported the conversion of Indians to Catholicism. Moreover (due to the inequities of India’s caste system), an overwhelming number of those converted came from the under-classes and untouchables – all of whom did, or believed that they would, benefit economically by doing so. Nevertheless, besides Hindus, a goodly number of those few former-upper-caste-Hindu Christians, as well as Sikhs and Moslems (all of whom claim to be classless), have been known to maintain their distinctions of caste. (Although, having Arab ancestry appears to be a social plus for Moslems.)

It should also be noted, that Jews (whose claimed ancestors were said to have fled to India as a result of the massacres in Palestine by Julius Severus in 137 AD – and their post-1492 expulsion from Spain) were never persecuted in India for their religious beliefs by either Hindus or Moslems. Nevertheless, no sooner had they convinced the Israelis that they were, indeed, Jews (despite their physical makeup

being no different than other Indians), then virtually all left India for the Promised Land.

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[At the turn of the millennia, India had at least a half-billion impoverished illiterate and near-illiterate citizens – all of whom, much like their Amerind and African-American counterparts in America, if they are ever to join society as equals, will be in need of financial assistance and preferential treatment. Though hardly adequate, and often accompanied by governmental incompetence and fraud, earnest attempts to accomplish those ends have been made by every post-colonial-era, Indian government.]

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When the Indian gentleman disputes, as uncalled for, the right of living African-Americans and Amerinds to attempt to collect some sort of compensation for the past violence and horrible indignities inflicted on their ancestors, he displays a total ignorance of the ongoing injustices that continue to be leveled against them. Although there are many from amongst those groups who've been successful in America (such as Clarence Thomas, Colin Powell and Condoleezza Rice) and, as a consequence appear to support the Indian gentleman's contention, the fact remains that the overwhelming majority of them (Amerinds in the Southwest and African-Americans nationwide) along with their progeny, still remain fixed in a subordinate position in America's social and economic pecking order.

The Indian gentleman's spoutings were those of a rice-Christian's: rationalizations for accepting a well-scrubbed and never-was version of a Euro-centric, Judeo-Christian culture. This, he did, as he went about denying the debt all modern-day Indian Christians have to one of the world's earliest known civilizations: that of the Indus River (with its pre-colonialism-era influences of Hinduism, Jainism,

Buddhism, Islam, Zoroastrianism, Sikhism and early Buddhao-Christianity). Due to his glorifying the results of his ancestors' subjugation by the West's Judeo-Christian colonizers (as a brainwashed convert, he claimed that this was good, in that it civilized all Indians), he showed just how ignorant he was – especially of his Indian heritage.

All of which causes one to wonder just why the individual at the *liberal* radio station, who was responsible for programming (it was not a frivolous, random phone-in), allowed this particular person to speak as a representative of all Indians. Surely, the individual who set up the program must have realized that the opinions of India's one billion peoples are at least as diverse as those of Americans – who number less than a third. Moreover, when anyone speaks on this radio station, even as a "call-in", listeners are routinely made aware, indirectly when not directly, of just what sort of bias the speaker might have – thereby allowing the average intelligent listener to consider the potential for partiality by a speaker. It was not done in this instance.

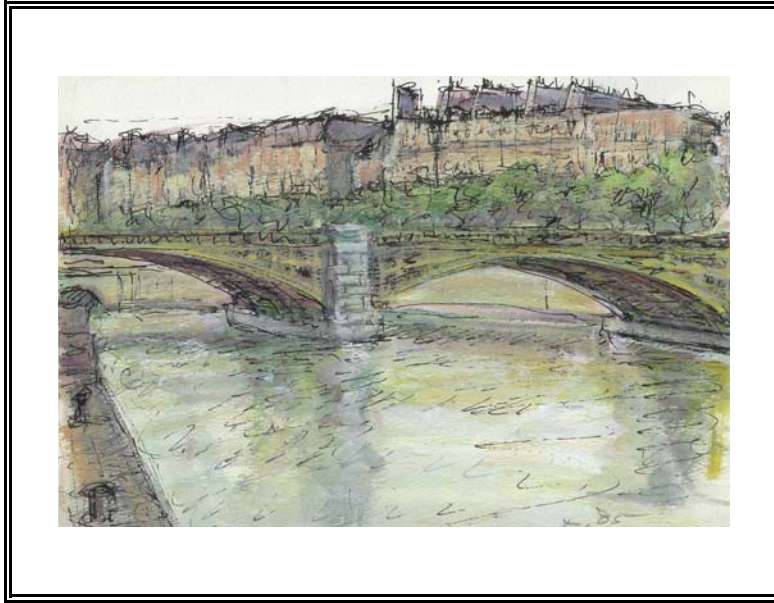
There is, of course, another possibility which is even more troubling – and that's that the radio station wanted to be controversial. This, may also be the reason for the latest bout of racist-based, claimed-to-be-liberal programming – which is politically correct, in that it's not anti-Semitic or racist – in so far as Latinos and African-Americans are concerned. And, if that's the case, then those individuals involved should be ashamed of themselves.

By their accepting the Christian Indian's pro-colonialism-by-the-Brits stance, and encouraging him to spout his nonsensical, greed-cum-convert-based rationalizations (without explaining his bias) for the destruction of the lives and culture of the ancestors of the American Indian and African-American (as well as for that of Asia's Indian and all other once-colonized peoples), serves only to give logic

to the argument by bigots intent on denying the rights of all those peoples who continue to suffer as a result of the West's past rapacious activities: activities currently being engaged in by all the followers of that truly-universal, modern religion: *Moneytheism*.

Had it not been for left-leaning Americans, with few exceptions, none but North Europeans would have been encouraged to migrate to America and Asians would have been barred. With the liberal-backed changes in the law in the early 1960's, those Indians encouraged and/or allowed to migrate to America, had middle- to upper-middle-class social and economic backgrounds. And, much like all those other folks then immigrating to America, they had the desire to achieve the American dream (especially money-wise). All of which caused many to vote Republican – despite the xenophobic, bigotry-based murders and insults carried out against them in the aftermath of 9/11.

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Paris - 1985 (watercolor - Pen and Ink)

XVIII

EINSTEIN – GANDHI – HITLER

Laying the groundwork for the Twenty-first Century

Part I

As the second millennium came to an end, a poll-crazy American citizenry was asked their opinion, as to: who was the most influential individual of the twentieth century. Albert Einstein, no doubt because of his *theory of general relativity*, which allowed for the making of the atomic bomb, and consequently helped to bring about the making of the nuclear-cum-space ages – was declared the winner. Nevertheless, the writer, as well as a goodly number of those polled, believed that a runner-up, Mohandas Gandhi, had a greater influence, humane-wise, on the doings of the last century. His success in applying a non-violent approach for the attainment of freedom for all oppressed people, was to be adopted, in toto, by two of the twentieth century's foremost civil rights leaders: Nelson Mandela, and Martin Luther King. The significance of Gandhi's selfless leadership as a humanitarian, proved to be the catalyst that brought about the most significant changes in the attitudes towards all formerly subjugated peoples (worldwide) – since the spread of Buddhism and of early Christianity.

Perhaps the reason for Gandhi's not being chosen, was due to his having advocated civil disobedience – which was considered a political act that served as the means for

ridding a goodly portion of the world's peoples from the militarily-maintained, economic and cultural domination by wealthy, Judeo-Christian, European peoples (who were included amongst the folks who awarded the Nobel Peace Prize – Gandhi wasn't chosen for that either). In pre-partition India, as well as in most one-time-colonized lands, the greed-motivated colonial powers used their self-serving interpretation of the Bible to make moral their own stealing (through the use of deceit and overwhelming military force) of the lands of alien peoples. God had authorized the Biblical Hebrews to do it – so, He most assuredly would justify their (the Bible-revering colonizers) theft of as many *Promised Lands* as they could acquire.

In more recent times, with the supposed end of colonialism, due to their accumulation and investment of the wealth derived from their having appropriated the treasures of their former colonies, the West's Judeo-Christian, moneyed folks are able to continue to influence – when not control, the economies of their own countries. Moreover, despite fruitless attempts by other nations to be free of such domination – those same folks have managed to exert power over the economies of virtually every political entity, worldwide.

[The individuals who used the monies earned, as a result of their control of industries that benefited from their Nazi connections, as well as those who benefited from their links to the Mafia, have been the object of governmental and individual monetary and judicial retribution. Attempts to recover unscrupulously acquired monies were intended to punish those folks for their having participated in some of the vilest of mankind's greed-motivated activities: the one through the horrific use of slave labor (said to precede their ultimate transportation to gas chambers) and the other by calculated, murderous doings. But, the West's former colonial powers, all of whom had, until quite

recently, acquired their wealth by means equally horrific, smugly uphold the legality of their retaining their also brutally-attained wealth and power.]



In retrospect, now that the twenty-first century is unfolding, it should become obvious that neither Gandhi nor Einstein, as influential to the happenings of the twentieth century as they were, deserves a number-one designation. But, why was the man most deserving of being *numero uno*, Adolf Hitler, ignored? After all, his life had a seminal impact on both the scientific and political goings-on of the last century. And if not for him, neither Gandhi nor Einstein, though both were dominant world figures prior to the onset of WWII, would have had the opportunity to fulfill, what is now thought to have been their destinies: the one, instrumental in the freeing of billions from militarily-enforced colonialism and racism-based servitude; the other for having enabled the exploration of space and the making of bombs capable of democratically destroying humanity: both communists and capitalists, the downtrodden and the wealthy.

Moreover, worldwide, the cataclysmic effects on politics, economics and science, of Hitler's having lived, can be perceived as influencing every significant happening of the twenty-first century – perhaps, even more so than they have to date. The obvious reason for his having been ignored is that he was totally depraved; he was so racist and ruthless that he was responsible for deeds far more heinous than even the leaders of the most-detestable, Judeo-Christian, colonial powers had willingly admitted to having engaged in.

Hitler's most evil objectives were carried out with Teutonic precision and thoroughness. As a consequence, Hitler cannot be held solely responsible for the gruesome acts

committed under his orders – it did require the active participation of a sizable portion of the German people – and the tacit approval of his depraved doings by the nation as a whole – which included those “good” people claiming to have been “good” Germans. After all, in the election after his having espoused and activated the most virulent form of racial and religious intolerance (albeit, prior to the institution of the *Final Solution*) – Adolf Hitler received the supportive votes of eighty percent of the “good” German electorate.

[When any nation’s leaders engage in atrocious doings and resort to the use of barbaric treatment towards a thought-to-be alien people – even if claiming their God’s support, the people, no matter what their religious or irreligious beliefs, must also be held responsible for allowing their nation to function in such a manner. And this does not absolve the people of their responsibility, no matter what the form of their government, but especially those citizens of nations claiming to be democracies: those people have no excuse, whatsoever. There are times when citizens, while risking being called unpatriotic, must speak out against the immoral activities that their government is engaging in – and if necessary refuse to participate in them: directly or indirectly.]

[In Moslem nations, there are believers who have spoken out against the atrocities committed against non-Islamists. In India, there are believers who speak out against the atrocities committed against non-Hindus. In Israel, there are Jews who have spoken out against the atrocities committed against Palestinians. And, in America, there are patriotic Americans who have spoken out against the atrocities committed against non-Euro-Caucasian Judeo-Christians – aka Moslems. However, since speaking out seems to have had little or no effect, people should risk more than just being considered unpatriotic for voicing an

opinion. In which case, perhaps they might take their cue from Gandhi – and resort to Civil Disobedience.]

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Though an unintended result, the post-WWII Marshall Plan supported quite a bit of socialism. West Europeans were to gain universal medical coverage, long-term unemployment compensation, insured retirement payments and monetary support for all viable candidates to elected public office – all of which is more-or-less lacking in America. The main objective of America's billions-of-dollars expenditure, though having a somewhat do-good purpose, was intended to dissuade West Europe from going totally pink – or even worse: bright red. And, although the Marshall Plans' support for capitalism was intended to deter Europe from nationalizing its industries, European industries, whether or not planned for, ended up being subject to capitalistic America's indirect, when not direct control. Moreover, under the Marshall plan, Nazi-Germany's Hitler-sponsored, slave-labor-utilizing industrialists were to benefit alongside the Anglo-American-dominated, multinational corporations. At the time, this included those corporations from the former and remaining colonial powers – and those corporations, much like those of Nazi Germany, had also acquired their corporate profitability due to the indirect, when not direct, use of slave-wage-earning workers, and often, outright slave labor.

[As a continuation of FDR's determination to put an end to colonialism, the Dutch were told by America that if they continued to murder Indonesians in their effort to maintain their South Asian possessions, they'd get no Marshall Plan aid – it worked, they left. Though Europeans eventually gave up their political, military and economic control over virtually all their colonies, the moneyed folks from America and the now-former colonial powers, as multinationals, are

in the process of attempting to retake absolute control of the economies (when not also the governments) of those former colonies – as well as that of their own countries. This modern-day class-, religion- and racism-based, greed-motivated colonialism has been euphemistically renamed: the New World Order.]

Prior to the cold-war-caused, financial collapse of the Soviet Union, the capitalist world made attempts to insure that the *Free-World's* average citizenry benefited, at least to some degree, from the doings of the then, ever-expanding, multinational corporations. However, no matter what one's feelings about socialism, it's obvious, that the destruction of communist Russia allowed for the establishment of a freewheeling, runaway, greed-motivated form of capitalism. No longer was there any reason for Western entrepreneurs to consider the possibility of demands by labor for benefits equal to, or better than those received by folks living in a socialist state. And, as time passed, European, as well as American workers, were required to work longer hours, often for less pay – with less time off. And the rich got richer.

Furthermore, in an attempt to maintain a rich-man, poor-man status quo, the progeny of the well-to-do and wealthy (despite their nepotistic advantages) having little faith in their own ability to compete on equal terms with the nation's average, also-motivated-to-get-rich youths, turned to neo- and paleo-conservatism as a means of preserving their unearned economic and social status.

Many of these scared, incompetent offspring of moneyed Westerners, have become, as Neocons, willing supporters of the attempts to establish a New World Order: that euphemism for that old-time, militarily-enforced colonialism. The intended result, is to return the world's less-than-rich citizenry (which includes the vast majority of

folks worldwide) to a life of economic subordination – one that will have them subject to the whims of a plutocratic, Judeo-Christian society. And, sad to say, this too is the apparent result of the destruction of the Soviet Union.

Coincidentally, the chairman of America's Federal Reserve System, who has served since the time of the breakup of the Soviet Union, is a proponent of a modern-day interpretation of that two-centuries-old rationalization (the dismal science) for the no-holds-barred, economic servitude of that era's working class. That America's most influential money man can claim (as the means of maintaining the wealth of the nation) that the establishment of a minimum wage and government support for the aged, sick and mentally ill is harmful to the nation's economy, and must be terminated, or at the very least reduced, while accepting the need for tax breaks for the wealthy – could only be tolerated in the post-cold-war era.

The defeat of Russia (though peacefully accomplished, was a fulfillment of one of Hitler's plans for world domination – accomplished by America's first back-to-Hooverdom-president, Reagan) has given confidence to the big money folks that there's no imminent threat from a socialist movement that could challenge the return to robber-baron, capitalist greed. With no counterbalance to prevent the spread of a Bible-rationalized avarice, though formerly associated solely with the doings of those nations dominated by Judeo-Christian majorities, the creed of greed is now in the process of permeating the moral fiber of even the once most socialist and anti-capitalist nations.

[As the twenty-first century unfolds, the incomes of the wealthy, top one percent of Americans, in relation to that of the rest of the country's citizenry, have returned to that which existed under Hoover – in 1928, the year before the big crash. From 1980 on, appeals to greed and bigotry

have been far more effective in winning political support than appeals for fair play in matters relating to education, health care, a living minimum wage, ecological responsibility and legislation allowing all Americans the ability to choose their own lifestyle. None of which precludes there being debate – to determine just how those ends can be accomplished. But they sure as hell should be the desired ends for any democracy whose people go about claiming to be members of a just society.]

For better or worse (depending on whether you're rich or poor), as the threat of socialism declines, so too do the living standards decline for the lower-income earners in most once-prosperous, older and fully-developed capitalist nations. Which should give pause for a rethinking by the world's avaricious folks, because, throughout history, the exercising of unrestrained greed by all-powerful rulers, groups or individuals, while benefiting the few, has ultimately led to their overthrow – and often to a horrific demise for all even remotely associated with them.



Considering the atrocious doings of Adolf Hitler, is it proper for him to be designated the most dominant personality of the twentieth century? Answering a question with a question, when not a Socrates, seems a sneaky way to avoid showing one's ignorance. Nevertheless, despite being aware of what the fatal consequences were for that great philosopher (the result of his inquisitiveness) – here goes.

But, first let's decide whether or not naming a person as being the most influential of any period is tantamount to honoring him. If it is an honor to name Hitler, it's only a skinhead who could consider it one. Moreover, in retrospect, throughout history, the most influential people of their times have been, more often than not, despicable

murderers who, though feared, were only admired in their time by their fawning acolytes – or psychotic wannabes. Nowadays, the murdering Alexander, Constantine, Attila, Charlemagne, Tamerlane, Henry the Eighth, Cortes, Pizarro, Aurangzeb – to name a few, have, if any, only a small number of detractors, but are honored by many. Nevertheless, what history might say a few centuries from now about Hitler, is not now pertinent (nor is anything good about him now conceivable). So, let's ignore the assertions by those folks, including those claiming that they could have been victims of his most horrible doings, who understandably, yet unthinkingly, might protest the considering of Hitler as the most influential individual of the twentieth century. Let's instead consider the whys and wherefores for believing that the indisputably despicable Adolf Hitler should have been voted the most influential figure of the twentieth century. And, in doing so, first let's give a quick, admittedly superficial, survey of what might have led to the making of an Adolf Hitler.

[There's been no evidence of extreme anger being expressed after Dubya was named as the most influential individual of the year – for the second time during the twenty-first century. So, one would assume that no liberal would be offended as a result of Hitler's being considered the most influential individual of the twentieth century.]

Freud, perhaps due to his own shortcomings, possibly looked to a sexual cause for neurotic and psychotic behavior in all folks. Take, for instance, his claims of penis envy by women – transference on his part? But, in Hitler's case, instead of sexual inadequacy (which he might well have had), could his having failed as an artist be the root cause for his being a madman? Is it possible that his non-acceptance as a student at the academy in Vienna was responsible for his attempts to compensate for it, in any way he could? Moreover, is it possible that the person in

charge of admissions at the academy was an ethnic Jew – or was it that a man he believed to be a Jew was accepted, while he, a born Christian, in a Christian country, was rejected?

[Though humor, at the very least, is frowned upon when considering the doings of Adolf Hitler (unless by a Charlie Chaplin) – one can't help but think that he could have made up for his shortcomings as an artist, as so many incompetents do, by becoming an art critic – which, though occasionally disastrous for the art world, would be far less so for the world at large. Considering the potentially devastating effects of the alternative, perhaps, failed artists should receive encouragement from governments when they show an inclination to turn to a career of art criticism.]



If not for Germany's WWI attempt to become a major colonial power, thereby jeopardizing England's and France's absolute control of their colonies, would there have been a chance for the Corporal and future Chancellor Hitler to acquire a self-esteem-gaining Iron Cross for bravery?

[The hypocrisy involved in European real politics can be best illustrated by the British threat to Holland, at the outset of WWI. The Brits stated that they'd not prevent Japan from taking over the Dutch East Indies (Indonesia) – which did keep the Netherlands from joining with Germany against the Allies. As a result, that nation remained neutral – and the Japanese were only allowed to acquire Germany's Pacific "possessions". The Japanese had to wait until WWII, when, without England's permission, they temporarily acquired Holland's Asian "possessions".]

And, then, if not for the post-WWI vengeful imposition of economy-destroying reparations – which were to lay the

groundwork for defeated Germany's economic collapse, would Adolf Hitler have been able to appeal to those who aided him in his drive for dictatorial power?

As to America, would her people have recovered from the Great Depression without the boon in manufacturing caused by the gearing-up for Europe's and America's own involvement in what was to be WWII: a war (supported by the overwhelming majority of "good" Germans) that was initiated by the deranged, ego-maniac Hitler? And, would Japan have attacked Pearl Harbor if Hitler's Germany had not been so successful in her land grabbing attempts during the early years of WWII ?

If not for the military vulnerability revealed by Japan's ease in demolishing the armies of Europe's colonial powers, and the subsequent post-WWII waning of their war-making ability and temporary decline of their economic strength, would Gandhi's ongoing, passive-resistance movement, along with pressures from a then-liberal, post-WWII, relatively-moral America, have been able to induce those colonial powers: England and Holland, to give up their empires – the obvious result of their reluctantly ceding independence to India and Indonesia?

If not for WWII, would the domino-like effect of India's and Indonesia's gaining their independence have eventually led to self-government for other subject nations? – and to equality under the law gained by so many other people: those who had no ethnic ties to the Judeo-Christian folks with ancestors from, or residing in, one of Europe's *Preferred Nations*?

Would the huge expenditures required to develop the atomic bomb and its monumental effects on world events have occurred, had it not been for Hitler's instigating WWII?

Considering the mammoth costs involved in research, experimentation and its eventual manufacture – as well as the political clout of those corporate interests: America's oil, coal and gas industries – all fearing the potential peaceful applications of atomic power as a cheap source of energy – would the American taxpayer have made the huge investment that was required to create the atom bomb? And, if not for that investment, would atomic energy have been developed – in the last half of the twentieth century or even for generations to come? Moreover, without the threat of an atomic war and mutual annihilation, would Russia and America have been involved in an economically-ruinous hot WWII – rather than the economically-ruinous cold war?

Would the vast sums of taxpayers' money have been invested in the scientific research and development that so affected the post-WWII world – had it not been for the exigencies resulting from the Hitler-initiated WWII and the consequential cold-war between the USSR and the USA?

If not for Germany's development, ordered by Hitler, of rocket propelled missiles as a means of terrorizing Britain, would the cold-war rivalry between America and Russia have resulted in their investing those multi-billions of dollars in developing rockets capable of landing a man on the moon (albeit, with the aid of Nazi Germany's scientists), or of carrying men to an orbiting space station?

And if not for Russia's cold-war-motivated sputnik, would a major investment for research and development have been made with entrepreneurial, private funds sufficient to have communications satellites and their ilk whirling around the sky high above, giving us satellite TV and the ability to spy, big-brother-like, on folks, both in America and abroad?



As a result of his having lived, Adolf Hitler caused (albeit, inadvertently), worldwide, the most far-reaching political, religious and economic realignments and radical advancements in manufacturing, technology and every branch of the sciences of the twentieth century. And, again unwittingly, his having lived was instrumental in causing the catastrophic happenings leading up to and during the onset of the twenty-first century.

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Though far greater devastation has been inflicted on most nations – the majority of folks, worldwide, sense that the events of 9/11 were being used by the Bush administration to rationalize the invasion of Iraq (a nation that had nothing to do with 9/11). Moreover, it now appears that it's being used to aid in an attempt to establish a New World Order: a rehash of old-time colonialism. This new form of colonialism, one that's being sanctimoniously characterized as being nothing less than democracy-in-action, is intended to be dominated, primarily, by a new breed of greed-motivated individuals from nations worldwide – but mainly from Europe, America and the former British colonies with dominant Euro-Judeo-Christian populations.

The terrorist attack of 9/11 was used as the triggering device for America's invasion of Iraq: which, it turns out, had been planned for from day one of Dubya's contentious presidency. As expected, America's powerful military, without much fuss or ado, defeated Iraq – a nation known to have had no air force, no navy, and no army: except for a few divisions of comparatively-poorly-armed, loyal-to-Hussein troops and the remnants of the previously-devastated divisions that were left over from Desert Storm. However, due to the incompetence, ignorance, greed, self-interest or recklessness of those pushing for the attack on

Iraq, a befuddled Bush administration got America bogged down in a no-win war against the very people whom the American people were told, once Saddam Hussein's forces were defeated, would welcome us with open arms.

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There appears to be no question that America's decision to attack Iraq was influenced significantly by Texas oil interests and by pro-Israel Neocons. And, it would have been with difficulty to find anyone claiming to be Jewish, Orthodox or merely ethnic, who, at least initially, didn't support the invasion of Iraq. As a result, despite its backing by America's oil interests and an ever-present supply of xenophobic war-hawks (religious or not), along with the support of a majority of Southern-Baptist, Bible thumpers all gung-ho for the assault on Iraq, it's been considered by many as a Jewish-promoted war (a significant number of Neocons being ethnic Jews). This, much as the Vietnam war, was considered by many to be a Catholic-promoted war (at least during its early years) – despite its also having had the support, from scratch, of much the same folks as those who were to support the two wars against Iraq.

The parallel between the initial blanket support by the overwhelming majority of Jews for the Iraqi conflict and that of Catholics, for the war in Vietnam, is not unreasonable. Although the war in Vietnam was being touted as one designed to thwart the spread of communism – American forces did, in effect, support the domination of the Vietnamese people by a Catholic minority – which was headed up by a corrupt, Frenchified-Catholic regime. Since Kennedy's decision (against the advice of his generals) to initiate the war in Vietnam was, at least in its earliest stages, supported by Catholic clergy, especially in Boston, and vocally by American Catholics in general – that the Vietnam war was, in its origins, considered a Catholic war

(much as the Iraqi war, for similar reasons, is being considered a Jewish war), is surely not illogical.

[Both the wars in Vietnam (with a Buddhist majority) and Iraq (with its Moslem majority) were intended to impose America's Judeo-Christian consumerism (greed-based?) values in those countries. Some have contended that the Iraq war was intended to serve the interests of Israel, more-so than those of the petroleum industry – and was therefore a Jewish war, much as Vietnam was said to be a Catholic war, rather than merely a war to stop the spread of communism. But the facts are, that both wars needed and had the support of a majority of America's middle-class: the majority of whom considered themselves to be patriotic, law-abiding citizens.]

[Moreover, since a goodly portion of those folks who were amongst the first to support both the Vietnam and Iraqi wars were from the Southern states (Billy Graham, not known for his having ecumenical, let alone pantheistic or liberal leanings, was one of the most influential supporters of the wars in Iraq), and our foes were neither Judeo-Christians nor Euro-Caucasians, it wouldn't be a stretch of the imagination to assume that an appreciable degree of religious bigotry and racism had a major input for that broad-based American support. And, without that appeal to the basest instincts of that segment of Americans, it's doubtful that either Catholic or Jewish hawks (and they did and do exist), could have mustered the backing sufficient to convince a majority of the American people of the need to have engaged in any of those wars.]

Although George W. Bush's claim that the invasion of Iraq was a war against terrorism, it proved to be wrong – and was possibly a blatant lie. There were many reasons for America going into Iraq: oil, Israel and a disguised attempt to launch a New World Order, but terrorism was never one

of them. And the questionable claim that Iraq had weapons of mass destruction was also proven to be wrong; there was not one iota of reliable intelligence that supported the Bush-Blair contention that they had them – unless one takes into account the Bush administration's having used as evidence, the claims of a sleazy Irani politico whose only credentials appear to have been that he spoke English well; was a non-religious Moslem; was anti-Saddam Hussein and was paid millions to tell the Neocon (and Bush's sure-to-be-elected, candidate for president of the World Bank), Wolfowitz, what he wanted to hear, which was then, no doubt, told to Bush – by way of Cheney.

Despite their obligation to follow the orders of the Commander-in-Chief, as passed down the chain of command, it must be demoralizing for a patriotic, professional soldier, marine or sailor to accept the fact that they've been involved in an immoral venture. As a result, in order to remain true to their uniform (providing that they've not been totally brainwashed) most intelligent service men, when and if made aware of the fabricated rationale for their going to war, must surely be in denial.

The court of world-opinion (which includes that of the majority of thinking Americans) has determined that the war in Iraq was illegal, uncalled-for and immoral. Moreover, there's no question, at least as of this writing (two-plus years having elapsed since March 19, 2003), that it's turning into a Vietnam-like fiasco. And, if they really thought that the attack on Iraq was called for, then it boggles the mind when considering the fact that the Bush administration failed to plan for the inevitable occupation.

Anyone who has ever served in America's armed forces (as did the author – a year in the occupation of Japan) is aware that, although the overwhelming majority of service men and women are basically decent human beings, there are

certainly a number who are not. Add to this, that, in order for decent human beings to willingly kill others – those others have to be made less than human. So, if one also takes into consideration the fact that our troops were totally unprepared to cope with the kind of occupation duty that unfolded in Iraq, no one should be surprised by the number of instances of thoughtless cruelty committed by a number of American troops who were untrained for the problems of occupation (many of whom had been, prior to their being sent, willy-nilly to Iraq – somewhat unfairly considered: *Weekend Warriors*).

This would have been bad enough, had top-level members of the Bush administration not made lawful the treatment of prisoners in contravention to the Articles of War (to which America is a signatory). Long before Americans at home were made aware, many Afghans and Iraqis (as well as American military men) knew of the sexual humiliation, brutal treatment and arbitrary torturing, that at times resulted in instances of deliberately-caused deaths (some 26, at last count), that were being approved or carried out by the CIA, hired-gun civilians and by poorly-trained reservist MPs – some of which, most notably occurred at Abu Ghraib. *[No one should be surprised that those ignorance-cum-race-based activities generated so much willing-to-kill-or-be-killed hostility towards Americans and the tagalong members of the coalition of the still-willing.]*

As an added result of the Bush administration's incompetence, American troops have suffered well over ten thousand battle wounded and some fifteen hundred deaths in Iraq alone. In addition there were ten-to-twenty-thousand, non-action-related physically- and mentally-disabled casualties who were hospitalized abroad, or sent back to the States. Moreover, since it's Bush-policy not to count the number of Iraqis: military and civilian, killed or wounded – it's impossible to give anything close to an

accurate count of their casualties. However, estimates that one hundred thousand Iraqi civilians have been killed over the past two years – have not been denied by the Bush administration.

Though not routinely mentioned, in addition to the American servicemen who have been wounded or killed in Iraq due to the actions and inactions of a Republican administration headed up by what many have claimed to be a narrow-minded, ignorant and incompetent flag-waver, were any number of the occupation force's low-paid foreign and high-paid American mercenaries – most of whom held jobs that, it's believed, had they been given to Iraqis, would have led to far less resentment of the American occupation of their country.

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Even an administration loaded down with numerous uncaring-of-world-opinion, oil- and gold-worshipping, religious and racist bigots, must have known that the random torturing of Iraqis would make the peaceful occupation of Iraq impossible. So, there's only one likely reason for its having been done – and that was the 2004 presidential election. Bush had to be seen as having a justification for spending those hundred-plus billions of American taxpayer's dollars and the deaths and maiming of all those American troops. *Although, he felt no need to justify the killing of those untold tens of thousands of Iraqis.*

Since the capture of Saddam Hussein was accomplished by the payment of a reward, the torturing of those made-miserable Iraqis, was obviously not done to accomplish that end. The only logical reason for the Bush people's having tacitly, if not overtly, authorized the horrific doings to the Iraqi prisoners was the possibility that they might discover at least a smidgen of an indication that something coming

close to resembling a connection between Saddam Hussein and Osama bin Laden existed – or that a tad of a trace that Weapons of Mass Destruction had been present prior to the invasion of Iraq.

[The Bush administration was well-aware that there was no Saddam Hussein-Osama bin Laden accord. Nor was there any reason to believe that Saddam Hussein had anything to do with the Al Qaeda 9/11 attacks. And, as far as W.M.D.s were concerned, the closest thing they came up with was the existence of a few non-descript trailers, which were originally claimed by the good cop, Powell, to be some kind of laboratories for the manufacture of W.M.D.s. – and that proved to be a fabrication.]

Candidate Bush managed to convince a sufficient number of gullible Americans that the prevailing guerilla warfare was the unintended result of his presidential need to defend America – and that the continuing stream of homecoming American dead and wounded was for a worthy Christian cause.

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It's now time to return to the most influential man of the twentieth century, Adolf Hitler.

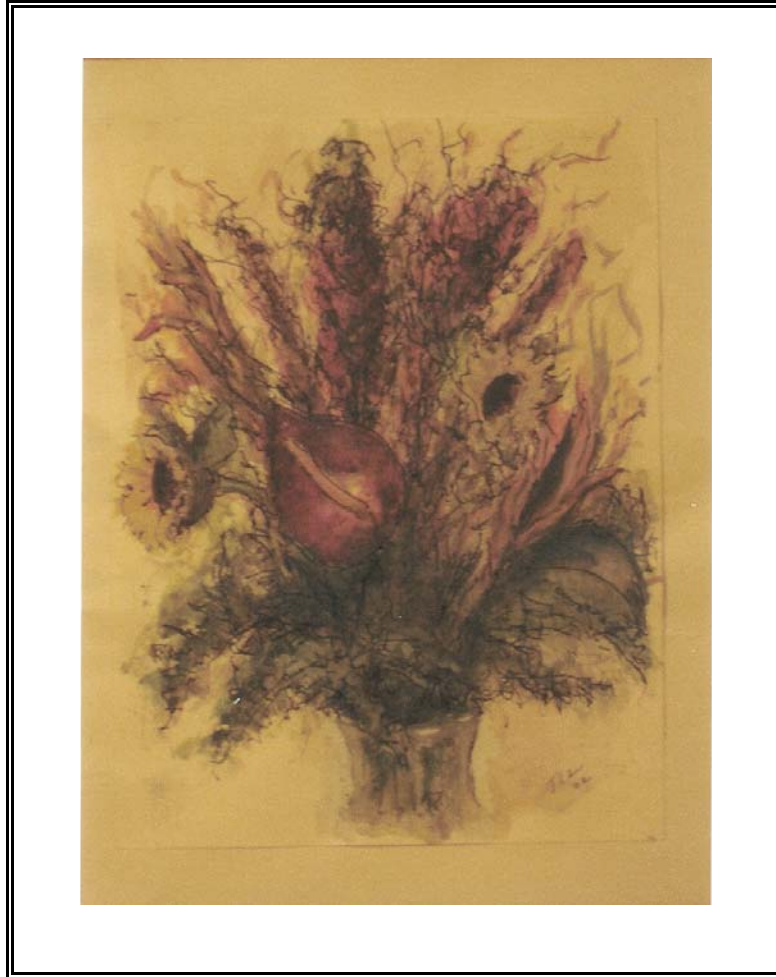
In the aftermath of WWI, with the humiliating and economically ruinous peace terms inflicted on the people of an already-bankrupted, war-time nation – the manifestations of the pride in their being German, previously instilled by Bismarck (during the 1860's and 70's), had all but disappeared. Bismarck had concocted a pseudo-Prussian identity for a miscellany of Central European peoples – as such, for half a century or so, they had gone proudly off to war against their said-to-be-less-macho opponents. Consequently, when they lost WWI, and were forced to accept those economically-devastating peace terms – they were at a loss as to who and what they were.

It was the Austrian-born Hitler who gave them back an identity. To do so, the loss of WWI had to be rationalized away; and it could not be due to the lack of bravery on the part of the German people. So, the losing of WWI was attributed by Hitler to another cause and another people: the German ethos was being contaminated by the presence in the Fatherland of inferior peoples. And those inferior people were: Gypsies, Jews, invalids and “girlie-boys” (a term used in 2004 by a prominent specimen of the master race – a Republican who was also Austrian-born). And, all those contaminants of the communal Teutonic persona had to be eradicated if Germany was again to be the home of a master race. It was the attempt to stabilize the German economy and give a positive identity to a defeated and demoralized people that allowed for the launching of the Nazi party, the career of Adolf Hitler and WWII: with its death of twenty million Russians – and, of course, the Holocaust.

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As a result of Bismarck’s having stressed a contrived racial identity for the people of a unified Germany, Jews had been excluded, and their thousand-year heritage as Germans was being denied – ergo, the Zionist movement that started in the latter part of the nineteenth century. Then, in the aftermath of the Holocaust, the establishment of the Zionist state of Israel was accomplished.

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Water Color – Floral Arrangement - 2003

EINSTEIN – GANDHI – HITLER

Laying the groundwork for the Twenty-first Century

Part II

In the States, within little more than a decade after WWII, the conviction that we're all just Americans was being questioned. And, by the end of the 1960's it was proven to be an unjustified assumption: the hyphenate was resurrected. Much of it had to do with the opening up of America to an influx of immigrants. Although virtually all were anxious to become American citizens, some brought their homeland bigotries with them. And, many of those from Europe's former Axis nations, perhaps because they or their parents were Nazis or Nazi sympathizers (with many arriving by way of Latin America), were intent on rationalizing or denying Nazi Germany's vilest doings: "No German could ever commit such atrocities, and besides, the Holocaust never happened – and if it did, the Jews deserved it." In addition, perhaps as a reaction to the return of a more assertive business approach by many Jews (especially by the most aggressive and least talented) or, for Irish-Americans to justify the inaction of the Pope, as well as Ireland's neutrality during WWII, signs of anti-Semitism began to resurface – nationwide.

Meanwhile, whether in response to the creeping anti-Jewish sentiment that began to crop up in America, or the input of Israel's successful war of 1967, many Jews began, originally at a snail's pace, to associate themselves, pride-wise, more and more with their Jewish heritage. And, by the onset of the 1990's many non-religious, ethnic Jews began to display a distinctive identity – perhaps as a: "you can't fire me, I quit," defense mechanism to growing anti-

Semitism – or to their acceptance of a guilt laid on them by Israel’s post-Desert Storm propaganda.

With so many non-religious Jews becoming *born-again Jews*, obvious signs of their religious affiliation were to become ubiquitous. No longer was it enough to call chicken soup, Jewish penicillin or chow mein, Jewish soul food, as a means of gaining an identity. At first, the displaying of a large six-pointed star, usually of a distinctive design (as big and as obvious as the cross so often displayed by Catholics belonging to a socially-low-standing racial or ethnic group) became de rigueur for a goodly number of Jewish women – and skull caps were soon to follow for the men.

For many of America’s diversity of resuscitated hyphenates, there were lots of reasons for their stressing their ethnicity. Probably a broad-based one is that in the past, some had thought of themselves strictly as Americans (that generic type of non-religious pseudo-Protestant) – and consequently believed what they had been taught in grade school: that their forefathers were amongst those who had brought forth this new nation, America – only to be rudely awakened and made to realize, as they grew up, that it didn’t really apply to them.

And, although being reticent to go into the nitty-gritty details of one’s ancestry was a sentiment experienced by a cross-section of most Americans (all except Amerinds being immigrants) – when manifested by South and East European hyphenates, it was considered a character flaw. Therefore, for some Jews, by their deliberately broadcasting their ethnicity, they could no longer be considered cowardly – as was the German Jew depicted in “Cabaret“. However, the overt manifestations of their ethno-religious antecedents comes off to many folks, worldwide (much as the insistence of Sikhs to wear their turbans or of Blacks during the 1960’s and 70’s with their

Afros) as a sign of arrogance and hubris – no doubt, this causes some Jews to figure that, whatever they do they can't win.

[However, it should also be noted that there are Jews who seem to deliberately flaunt, what could best be described, a Fagin-like demeanor, as a means of deliberately stirring up anti-Semitic reactions from people who don't really care whether the person is, or isn't a Jew. Giving the impression to many that the last thing some Jews want is to be ignored – no matter what.]

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All of which brings us to the post-WWII turmoil in the Near East. There's no question that British and French post-WWI greed – the same sort that eventually supplied the fertile ground for the establishment of a Nazi government in Germany – set the stage for the continuing mayhem in the Fertile Crescent. And, it was the resultant establishment, some thirty years later of the Jewish state of Israel, that provoked much of the ongoing hostilities in that part of the world.

And, here again we have to look to Hitler. If not for him, would that country exist? Zionism (despite the Balfour statement of 1917) had been going nowhere until the world was made fully aware of the enormity of the Nazi-administered Holocaust. It requires no stretch of the imagination to conclude that without Hitler's having ordered the horrendous murdering of those millions of innocent and law-abiding Jews, there'd be no Israel. If not for the Holocaust, the well-deserved Christian guilt, so necessary for the creation of a Jewish promised land, which required the ousting of millions of Palestinian Moslems, would have been lacking. Moreover, if not for the Holocaust, the disparate post-WWII elements of worldwide Jewry would never have merged into a unified political

force strong enough to influence, if not determine aspects of American foreign policy: a policy that was to give unequivocal military, economic and moral support for every action taken by the state of Israel. Although there should be no question that oil is the major reason for an American presence in Arab lands, without the existence of the state of Israel, it's difficult to conceive of an America that would be embroiled in the near-continuous political, economic and military doings in the Near East.

Now then, if not for the establishment of a Jewish state carved out of Moslem dominated lands, would there have been an alignment of virtually all Arab and non-Arab Moslem states? And, if the United States had not recognized and then supplied Israelis with money and armaments which allowed them to defend themselves, as well as aggressively and illegally to misappropriate additional Arab lands, would the growing hostile attitude towards America persist amongst so many Moslems? And, is it possible that that enmity towards America is responsible for the support of, if not the very existence of Osama bin Laden's al Qaeda – and the resultant attacks of 9/11?

Has that unquestioning support by America for just about every action taken by Israel destroyed America's ability to act as an honest broker when involved in attempting to resolve the conflict between Palestinians and Israelis? And, has this brought about a worldwide distrust of America's intentions – not only amongst Moslems, but amongst all peoples in the world at large? (*In 2005, more Germans were said to trust Putin than Bush!*)

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The term Neocon has sneaked up on America. Upon first hearing the name, it was assumed that the folks covered by it were conservatives with a new approach. However, a

goodly number of old-time conservatives deny the right of Neocons to call themselves conservatives – new or otherwise.

One might be tempted to consider Henry Kissinger a proto-Neocon. Although there seems to be no difference between the geo-political goals and pro-Israel policies put forth by Henry Kissinger and those of the Neocons – Kissinger showed no signs of ever having been a liberal – and therefore can't really be claimed as one of their own by present-day Neocons – who claim such a distinction.

Those folks who allege to have once been liberal have, as Neocons, joined up with the bigoted, oil-rich and Fundamentalist Protestant wing of the Republican party's conservative element. And, if Neocons still have anything in common with truly-liberal Americans, it's that neither is anti-Semitic. (Unless, that is, by not believing the absurdity that any one people, let alone a people who were subjected to the horrors of the Holocaust, could be considered, or could consider themselves, to be chosen of God – turns a liberal into an anti-Semite.)

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This brings us to the following question: Since the Neocons have been ensconced in a position with a fair degree of authority within Dubya's administration – from its beginnings, and they're known to promote the establishment of a New World Order: one that's combined with their unthinking support for Israel, have they had a major influence on American foreign policy – especially that which involves our relations with the oil-producing Moslem world? And, has that striving for a New World Order, along with their attempts to enhance the economy and security of Israelis, taken precedent over the interests of all Americans?

Conversely, did the Bush administration, being aware of the Neocons' known proclivities (especially their blanket support for Israel), use them to garner political, economic and media backing that was sufficient to enable a reactionary Republican party to remain in power?

On the Web, and in New York's major newspaper, an article dated August 27, 2004, made mention of a Pentagon official (a pro-Israel Christian having major input regarding the determination of the Bush, Neocon-dominated administration's policy towards Iran) turning over secret documents to the most powerful Israeli PAC – which thereupon turned them over to the Israeli government. And, in its August 27th to 29th weekend edition, a floundering Neocon newspaper known for its pro-everything-Israel-does editorial policy, made no mention of the above Israeli spy case. Instead, they ran an editorial berating Columbia University for accepting a gift from the Moslem president of a Gulf state. Why? Because, a newspaper in his country printed a crude, somewhat insulting caricature in a cartoon indicating that Israel controlled the American government in Washington. Since jokes and caricatures of Arabs have been made that are at least as offensive, was it the caricature, or was it that the allegations of the cartoon came too close to the truth?

According to one commentator, the reason there was no spying on America by paid-by-Israel informants or Israel sympathizers – was that they had no need to do so. Why, because Pro-Israel organizations have so much influence in Washington, and are so well informed on anything that can even remotely concern Israel, that there's absolutely no reason for Israel to spy on America. (Although, not that many years back, this didn't seem to be the case.)

[In the past, the writer had assumed that any talk of an all-powerful pro-Israel lobby's having undue influence over

American foreign policy was apt to have anti-Jewish roots. But the more one witnesses the activities of the Neocons, and their blind support for the doings of Israel and the pro-Israeli PACs (even when they might be involved in spying on America) – the more one realizes that the truth of the assertions might very well outweigh any inputs that might be attributed to anti-Semitism.]



Much like Diogenes, who searched for an honest man, the writer has searched for truthful reporting on Israel in the American press – and he has ascertained that some major newspapers do make attempts, from time to time, to report honestly on that ever-so-sensitive subject. However, as the beginning years of the twenty-first century pass, it becomes more and more obvious that there's one subject that's being more and more avoided by virtually all mass media. When Israel is mentioned, it ordinarily requires the ability of an Hercule Poirot to find any evidence of criticism, candor or truth (facts often, but truth?) when and where any action taken by that nation or any of her people are concerned.

[All too often, however, when one does find criticism of Israel, it's by bigots. Nevertheless, despite their prejudices including a heavy dollop of anti-Semitism, the thinking and activities of those bigots have much in common with that of the Neocons. All are of a kind: bigots of one sort or another who have lied in their attempts to — elect Dubya; destroy the Social Security System; give tax breaks to the wealthy; reverse Roe vs. Wade; prevent American workers from unionizing; create and secure a class of moneyed and landed nobility; and to continually attempt to rewrite the restrictions placed on Congress, as specified in Amendment I, of the US Constitution – all while hypocritically claiming that their intention is to help spread democracy to the world and to maintain it at home.]

On occasions, the writer has debated with an intellectually gifted friend, one who, in many respects, is far more knowledgeable and fair-minded than a Buckley but, lucky for the writer, not quite as combative in defending his opinions (although, the writer might not be as accepting of his point of view, if he were). The gentleman has been adamant in his claims that America's Neocons are, in reality, merely advocates for Israel and for that nation's acquisition of Arab lands. Moreover, he has claimed that the Tail, Israel, is wagging the Dog, America. All are sentiments, despite their having a substantial element of truth, that could earn him the ignominy of being called an anti-Semite.



The writer, although not brought up in the Jewish faith, has, on his mother's side, ancestors who were Jews (albeit, bigoted, Orthodox German ones who disowned, disinherited and excommunicated his mother for having married his father, a high-caste Hindu – a Kshatriya). And the fact that the writer's Belgium-born mother had Jewish ancestry caused some Jews (but only after they realized that he was quite intelligent, and hence, acceptable as one of the chosen) to willingly apply Hitler's definition of a Jew to him. And, so, because this would have made the writer fit for slaughter by the Nazis, he was expected to support the Israelis – no matter what. And should he not accept the preposterous concept (accepting the nonsensical assumption that there really is such a thing as a God?), that any group of individuals would be His chosen people – above all others – then he'd be in denial and a self-hater.

Nevertheless, one shouldn't ignore the fact that certain bigoted non-Jews, almost always losers (who may or may not be well educated) – if and when this writer's intelligence becomes apparent, also accept Hitler's

definition of a Jew (one based on the monk Mendel's pea-based genetic theories). By doing so, they can mitigate any sense of a comparative inadequacy that they might entertain. After all, just as Jewish losers go about attributing anti-Semitism for their inability to prove themselves to be chosen of God, non-Jewish losers (and it's no longer limited to just Christians) attempt to alleviate their shortcomings by claiming that all Jews cheat in some way, if not, they'd be winners.

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[Often told is Mohammed's plaint, that a prophet in his own land. is not revered. It seems to be a universal, that the average man or woman resents anyone, but especially one of their own, who breaks the mold of group mediocrity – unless that individual can be considered an idealized representative of the entire group. Hitler's having grouped together all Jews as one people, caused them, in turn, and despite their being a disparate peoples, to consider themselves members of a distinct segment of humanity.

[Then, as a result of Jews being considered (by a diversity of people, including Jews) an identifiable, well-defined group – they, perhaps in response to their being excluded from Christian society, went about creating a significant persona for themselves. In doing so, they began to claim a kinship to every prominent individual (living or dead, disreputable or not) believed to have Jewish ancestry. The flip side to all this, is that it rekindled a resentment of Jews, in general, by most other folks – nobody likes a braggart.

[This same sort of self-compartmentalization and self-promotion has come to pass for most people who have been or believe that they've been arbitrarily subjected to hate-based forms of racial, ethnic, sexual or religious bigotry. But this glomming together into an identifiable grouping

has tended to lead to the loss of an individual's unique identity, as well as the shucking-off of responsibility by the individual for the consequences of his actions — or lack thereof.]

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The domination by a Judeo-Christian, Euro-Caucasian alliance, whether one calls it the New World Order, neo-colonialism or neo-conservatism, requires a healthy dollop of real or believed-to-be-real anti-Semitism to maintain the ego-enhancing, bigotry-based concept of the superiority of all the individuals who make up the Western world. Anti-Semitism persists – as well as its manifestations, because it serves to bolster the self-esteem of all parties concerned. Its continued existence, or belief that it exists, is essential – if the self-worth of all those overly-ambitious losers, Jews included, who've been indoctrinated with the need for the acquisition of wealth, is to be preserved.

So, aside from those occasional intervals when folks are united against a common-to-all danger: a time when there's a general acceptance of the right for individuals to have beliefs or disbeliefs that are different (as long as they don't conflict with the needs of the common good), it's safe to assume that anti-Semitism: latent, overt, real and imagined – is here to stay.

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As a rule, the need to succeed, either professionally or economically (regardless of the individual's intellectual abilities), has been instilled in the Americans' psyche more so than in that of folks living in most other Western nations. However, this need to succeed seems to be stressed somewhat more in Jewish households, worldwide – where it's often reinforced by the confidence-building concept that one is chosen of God (which implies that others are

not). As a result, much as the case with all over-ambitious and mentally-or-physically-under-endowed individuals, when being competitive, whether or not as adults, it appears that Jews, as a whole, appear to be far more motivated (in relation to their innate ability) to succeed than those folks from other arbitrarily-designated groupings.

When this striving to succeed involves the making of money, the temptation to cut corners for all such overly ambitious folks, no matter what their ethnicity or religion, may be so great, that their doings border on, or cross over to the criminal. And, anyone aware of the shenanigans regarding tax evasion by non-Jewish owners of small businesses, as well as the outright crooked maneuvering, dealings and manipulations of non-Jewish big-buck executives and major stockholders of prominent banking institutions and billion-dollar corporations, realizes that illegal and often downright crooked dealings in business cannot, in any way, be ascribed to the doings of any one group of people.

Greed is what makes the capitalist world tick; and currently, the world includes such former bastions of socialism as Russia, China and India. And, although the number of Jews who are successful money-wise, may appear somewhat disproportionately large, if one takes into account the number of non-Jewish individuals with born-to and greed-acquired wealth, worldwide (or even just in the States), Jews make up but a small proportion of all those with riches – no matter how acquired.

[Although the Chinese are no slouches when it comes to making money, in China there's a popular book that delves into the whys and wherefores of Jewish commercial success. It is not in one's genes that one is entrepreneurial – it's based on the priorities and values that one is indoctrinated with during one's formative years.]

For many of America's ethnic Jews, besides a guilt born from their not moving to Israel and paranoia: their fear that a Holocaust could happen again (both stressed by the Israelis), there's the God-thing. In the immediate aftermath of WWII, they were in a quandary. Their thinking was: If there is a God, and if Jews are the chosen people of that God, what kind of a God would have allowed for the Holocaust? All of which, at least for the thinking, intelligent ethnic Jew, brought about a period of self-examination. This, in turn, resulted in their concluding that there was no God, or if there is One, that Jews were not chosen, and if they were chosen – what for?

Nevertheless, in time, despite the conclusions reached as a result of all their soul-searching, the alluring aspect of being one of the *chosen people* (much as the belief that one is a member of the *master race* was, and still is, for many Germans) proved to be too great to resist. Ergo, the more recent attempts by so many Jews to resurrect the God of the ancient Hebrews, and thereby, as born-again Jews, attempt to regain a meaningful chosen-people status for themselves.

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To try to put the Israeli/Palestinian conflict in perspective, it's necessary to go back to the 1917, WWI statement made by England's foreign secretary, Balfour, which promised support for the establishment of a Jewish national home in Palestine – though not, at the time, a British protectorate. Balfour's statement (later elevated to a "declaration") was purchased by the Rothschilds with a huge, much-needed-by-England, war-time loan. Despite the Balfour avowal, from 1920, until the outbreak of WWII, there were constant clashes between Palestinian Moslems and Zionist Jews: who were attempting to buy up much of the land.

Then, with the end of WWII, those Jews (mainly Germano-Slavic) who had managed to evade the incomprehensible, inhumane doings of a people gone mad, attempted, somewhat successfully, to descend, en masse, on Palestine – which, at the time, was being set up by the Brits to be an Arab Moslem state. However, European Jews, alienated after having been denied their national identities – as well as their humanity, were determined to have a country of their own, and turned to terrorism as a means of acquiring it. This convinced the British to withdraw – leaving the fighting (which, as of this writing, has no end in sight) to go on between the Palestinians and the Zionists.

The West's Judeo-Christians, in the aftermath of WWII, made an attempt to assuage their Holocaust-engendered guilt by supporting the establishment of a Jewish state (ignoring the fact that Moslems were, at the time, an overwhelming majority). The result of the establishment of the Jewish state of Israel meant for many ethnic, religious Jews, that Jehovah had returned. His vacation in Mexico City was over, and they were, indeed the chosen of a God Whom they could worship. Nevertheless, most non-practicing, ethnic Jews, did not appear to be totally convinced. More than just a homeland, no matter how acquired, was needed to cause them to believe that Jews were indeed "the chosen people". And, for the ethno-theocracy of Israel to prosper, besides the stressing of the Holocaust, the acceptance of their all being chosen of God by those wavering, non-religious, ethnic Jews, especially those in America, was imperative.

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Getting back to the conversation with his intellectually gifted friend, the writer, despite his being full-well aware that Jews are no more nor less strangers to the abasing exercise of bigotry and hypocrisy (both tacit and overt)

than any other folks, tried to explain to his friend, the whys and wherefores for the Jewish paranoia-born, anti-Palestinian-cum-Moslem rationalizations of any and all Israeli actions. Those Jews who blindly supported every action, whether or not loathsome, committed by their fellow, Hitler-designated-as-a-people – the Israelis – perhaps understandably, were responding to a still-somewhat-pervasive undercurrent of anti-Semitism, as well as in the name of: “Never Again!”.

Any thinking person must surely be aware that virtually every Israeli government has fostered the laying on of an admittedly well-deserved Holocaust-guilt on the world’s ethnic, Euro-Judeo-Christian peoples. What this has done, is cause otherwise-principled Euro-ethnic Christians to outwardly ignore any action taken by the Israelis against Moslems – which, no matter how lethal or injurious to the health and welfare of the Palestinians, were invariably claimed necessary to ensure the security of Israel proper – as well as that of the illegal settlements and their expansion on Palestinian lands.

As of this writing, promises of a withdrawal from Gaza (where nine thousand Israelis occupy twenty-five percent of the land and a million Arabs, the rest) have been made – along with promises of a very limited withdrawal from the illegal settlements in the West Bank,

[Adolf Hitler’s attempts to colonize the lands of Germany’s neighboring people (though eventually thwarted) resulted in a United Nations rule banning such acquisition. The Israelis, however, have persisted in their unlawful expansion – which is why they’ve lost the support of so many truly-liberal and thoughtful individuals. Nevertheless, this would hardly have any major significance, but for the fact that Israel’s post-1967 colonization of Palestinian lands has gained the support of America’s Neocons – and

neo-colonialism is but the doppelganger of the New World Order that is being touted by those same Neocons.]

Whether or not they had a name for them at the time, in the aftermath of the 1967, Arab-Israeli war, and the subsequent taking of Arab lands by Israel, some former liberals: those supporters of a neo-colonialism, Holocaust-rationalized, pro-anything-Israel-does-is-good segment, are now known as neo-conservatives: aka Neocons. (However, they appear to have but little semblance to the post-WWII neo-conservatives: those former depression-era liberals who started making money. Others, those maintaining their liberal credentials (whether or not they had money), felt that Israelis were using the 1967 war as an excuse to make a land grab. Consequently, guilt or no guilt, liberals (regardless of their religious considerations) no longer give their unquestioned support to Israel. Because of this, many ethnic Jews who had claimed liberal credentials (amongst them one former and one presiding mayor of America's leading city) supported America's racists; war-hawks; Fundamentalist Christians and old-guard, wealthy, fearful-of-true-democracy conservatives in debasing the very concept of liberalism – going so far as to help turn liberal into a dirty word.

[It should be noted that Italy's Jews supported Mussolini for many years, and many German Jews supported Adolf Hitler at the outset – believing that those men would offer economic stability to European business interests. The more things change, the more they remain the same.]

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As a consequence of the Holocaust, one can readily understand why Israelis believe that they must fend for themselves – and not care what anyone else says or thinks. Nevertheless, unless Israelis are intent on causing all Jews to seek security in Israel, they should take note: that besides

Moslems, a goodly portion of Euro-ethnic, non-Fundamentalist Christians, due to the perceived atrocities that so often accompany Israel's ten-eyes-for-an-eye biblical-rationalized retribution (albeit, often in retaliation for horrible acts committed by Moslem fanatics) against sitting-duck, poorly-armed Palestinians and stone-throwing boys, any anti-Semitic sentiments that they might have had, are being revived, reinforced and rationalized.

Israeli-promoted guilt is being laid on American Jews (either because they were not subjected to the horrors of the Holocaust – or that they and their parents had avoided going to the aid of those who were). As a result, when truly liberal Jews (and in most ways the majority still are) voice their now-considered-mandatory justification for every Israeli action that's taken against the Palestinian people, whether or not massively cruel or uncalled for – they seem, at the very least, to be quite embarrassed – as well they should be. All of which might cause Israel (much as it did Germany during Hitler's reign) to lose the unflinching support of their more-liberal-American, thought-to-be-tribal cohorts.



Although questioning the truthful interpretation of facts printed in American newspapers is routinely done (witness the many letters-to-the-editor), there appears to be a taboo on doing so when Israel, Israelis or Jews, in general, are concerned. Moreover, most of those same publications routinely publish articles that denigrate Moslems, Arabs, Palestinians and any other peoples not currently being protected by the prevailing rules of the politically correct. Whether it's a case of self-serving denial, self-censorship, or fear of economic reprisal, the questioning of problematic Israeli activities are, at best, fleeting, when not near-impossible to find. At most, when anything is capable of

being construed as casting a negative appraisal on the doings of Israel or any of her citizens, a matter-of-fact, non-controversial reference might be made to it. And, even that, more often than not, would be followed by a denial or rationalization by an Israeli official or a pro-Israel American. Moreover, on the rare occasion when an article faulting Israel is published – no matter how factual and unbiased, as often as not, its author is routinely labeled anti-Semitic.

There's no question, whatsoever, that Hitler's Holocaust was a horrendous event – one that, along with many other instances of man's inhumanity to man, the world should not forget. In addition, there's no questioning the fact that psychological, and often economic harm is visited upon those people who've been subjected to a bigotry-based discrimination and hostility. Nevertheless, despite the fact that such bigotry-based discrimination affects billions of people, the world over, Jews appear to claim, self-pityingly, to be subjected to it (as anti-Semitism) far more than, if not to the exclusion of, all others. And their constant bemoaning of the existence of anti-Semitism, along with their never-ending grieving about the Holocaust, since they appear to be nothing less than self-serving, can only make those very-real wrongs into meaningless clichés.

*

It's generally accepted that the Israeli lobby, due to its direct access to the highest levels of the Bush administration, had a hand in encouraging America's attack on Iraq (an outspoken supporter of Israel, the highest-ranking Neocon in the Bush administration, was involved in its planning and justification). Nevertheless, the Israeli lobbies were surely not alone in pressuring America into the invasion of Iraq: a war that two years after it began has resulted in fifteen-hundred-and-counting, dead American

service men and women – and costs ranging up into the hundreds-of-billions of US taxpayers' dollars.

The Israeli PACs were joined by Texas oil interests, bigoted Fundamentalist Christians and the usual flag-waving, war-hawks and those xenophobic racists who can be found nationwide, in being gung-ho for the war. There were also those who may or may not be known to have pushed for the assault on Iraq, but who were to benefit directly and indirectly from it. The stockholders and employees of America's manufacturers of military equipment; suppliers of services to the military; employers of the exorbitantly-paid mercenaries – and of course the funeral-servicing industry plus the suppliers of therapeutic devices and shrinks who tend to the physically and mentally disabled were all to benefit from the Bush administration's lies that led to the invasion of Iraq.



Further to all of the above, we find the Neocons and Bible-thumping, Fundamentalist Christians in political lockstep with the Bush-Chaney-Oil wing of the Republican party – and all have given unquestioning support for just about every action taken by the state of Israel. And, it appears that all are in cahoots in planning for the development of a Judeo-Christian-dominated neo-colonialism: aka The New World Order. And, that's scary.

[The New World Order is nothing less than that old-fashioned colonialism: repackaged – but with a new twist. It's projected to negate the need to have boots consistently on the ground – in order to milk the economies of alien peoples. The anticipated monetary control that will be exercised by the multinationals (who would be functioning under the military protection of the American hegemony), is expected to allow them to maintain jurisdiction over the

natural resources and economies of their in-the-process-of-being-made-or-kept-defenseless, client nations.]

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The State of Israel exists primarily due to the past support of America's Euro-Judeo-Christians (a consequence of their guilt and empathy resulting from their awareness of the horrors of the Holocaust inflicted by Hitler's Nazi-Germany). However, for Palestinian Arabs, and Moslems in general (virtually all of whose homelands, with the iffy exception of Turkey, Iran and Afghanistan, have, in the more recent past, been colonized by one or another rapacious Judeo-Christian European nation), their not-without-reason conception is that Zionism is merely a rationalization for that same old colonialism – only by European Jews, instead of European Christians. As a result, the Jewish State of Israel continues to be one of the most contentious and significant inputs causing the unsettling conditions in the Near East. And, for many, not only Moslems, the belief is that if not for the establishment of the State of Israel (exacerbated by the illegal Israeli post-1967-war occupation of Palestinian lands – those outside the internationally accepted boundaries of Israel proper), that part of the world would be in a near-politically-stable state (the presence of oil notwithstanding).

If a WWII were to break out, the continuous turmoil in the Near East will most likely be the catalyst that brings it on: a war that will truly be a contender for the one to end all wars. And, then, the Bible thumpers may very well get their Armageddon. However, whether or not they do, it's fair to assume that the momentous consequences of Hitler's having lived will have had a far greater impact on the human race than that resulting from either Gandhi or Einstein having been born.





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The End

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