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The Information Age Has a Breakdown

Andrea Perrault

During the 2016 presidential campaign, much political discussion revolved around the death of manufacturing in the United States, and its impact on the U.S. economy. The disappearance of manufacturing is not news, but the people who were most affected by it, most notably those in the Midwest, saw the situation as worse than dire and saw Donald Trump as their hero. Their voting patterns determined that it would be the make or break issue for the campaign. With their resolve, Donald Trump won the presidency; Republicans won the Senate and the House, and shock came to many, pundits and citizenry alike.

Many of us on the east and west coasts thought that the Information Age had supplanted the Manufacturing Age, and that the country was adjusting to the new reality in

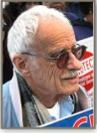
an acceptable fashion. Were we wrong!

The loss of jobs in the Midwest, the flat wages in the service sectors, and the need for significant training in technology meant that Bill Clinton's old buddy James Carville still had his eye on the prize – "It's the economy, stupid!". Democrats were waging a personal battle against "the Donald" whom they saw as an immoral villain. Attacking his vile lies, his vicious attacks on the disabled, women, and Mexicans, was seen by Democrats as the winning strategy.

But the Information Age in this election had a serious breakdown. Truth was on trial; no one could answer Donald Trump's tweets fast enough to get traction, and serious discussion of issues was impossible. We had entered new territory where the marketing gurus understood that the high ground would belong to the winner, not to the most honest or the most moral.

Donald Trump understood that the most outrageous would over-shadow the most factual and the most intellectual. Even when Elizabeth Warren confronted him attack for attack, it was too late. The pattern established during the Republican primary election had taken hold of the media and the public. It was information meltdown and a lunatic free for all ensued.

As we look ahead to the Presidency of Donald Trump, we can expect more of the same. The transition team plan has brought the most capitalist members of society to the fore, along with the military establishment. What kind of information will we be getting now, and how will the media respond? I think it is important to hear from everybody, including those who are devastated by the economic realities in the hardest hit areas of the country, as well as those in the better-off regions of the coasts. But getting a civil dialogue started seems like an impossible task. Can the breakdown be fixed? I have my doubts.



The Way It Is (?)

Marvin Miller

Human Rights

In other years I have written about human rights for the December newsletter, in recognition of the anniversaries of the Bill of Rights, Dec. 15, 1791, and the UN's Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Dec. 10, 1948. But January is also an appropriate month to remember human rights: it includes the birthday anniversaries of Franklin Roosevelt, Jan. 30, 1882, and Martin Luther King Jr., Jan. 15, 1929.

Dr. King's struggle for equal civil and political rights for African-Americans is well known. In his 'I have a dream' speech, he said that his dream was deeply rooted in the American dream, that all men are created equal. (In our day we would say all people are born equal.) Less well known is his struggle for economic rights and his opposition to the war in Vietnam, which he regarded as unjust. His last public appearance was in support of the sanitation workers of Memphis, who were on strike for decent treatment. The signs they carried said, "I am a man." One of Dr. King's memorable lines is "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere."

In his 1944 State of the Union message President Roosevelt said "We have come to a clear

realization of the fact that true individual freedom cannot exist without economic security and independence. 'Necessitous men are not free men.' People who are hungry and out of a job are the stuff of which dictatorships are made. . . We have accepted, so to speak, a second Bill of Rights . . ." including the right to a useful and remunerative job, adequate food, clothing, recreation, medical care, a good education, and a decent home. These economic rights were included in the UN's Declaration.

The UN Declaration isn't binding law: it's a declaration of rights. As it says in its Preamble, it's a "common standard of achievement for all peoples and all nations" toward the universal observance of which we all ought to strive. The Bill of Rights is part of the US Constitution, which is supposed to be the supreme law of the land.

Laws don't implement themselves. Those responsible for implementing them often find them inconvenient and ignore or violate them. The First Amendment says "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion," but Congress has done so by inserting "under God" into the Pledge of Allegiance and "In

God we Trust" onto the currency. The Fourth Amendment says "The right of the people to be secure in their persons, houses, papers, and effects against unreasonable searches and seizures shall not be violated," but now we are subject to constant surveillance by both government and private institutions in our on-line communications and elsewhere. The Fifth Amendment says "No person shall . . . be deprived of life . . . without due process of law," but we have seen many occasions when this has occurred. The Sixth Amendment says "In all criminal prosecutions the accused shall enjoy the right to a speedy and public trial," but almost none of the prisoners now held have had trials. They have been induced to plea-bargain by the threat of loss of the major part of their lives to imprisonment. The Eighth Amendment says excessive fines shall not be imposed, but we read of unaffordable fines for minor traffic violations that ruin people economically or subject them to jail.

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Evolution and the Earth

Peter Denison

Many people warn that the earth is in danger. Yet we know that our planet is now more than four billion years old and will probably last several billion more until our sun ultimately blows up. What people really mean is that human life may be in danger. Through the forces of evolution, many species have come into being, lived a number of years, and then died out. Over 99% of all species have run their course and become extinct.

We like to say that the dinosaurs "ruled" the earth for more than a hundred million years. Yes, they were obviously the largest animals on Earth for that period, but to say that they dominated the pests, insects, microbes, and parasites that fed on them and sickened or killed them is a stretch. Also, no single species survived throughout that period. Finally, due to environmental changes which included a gigantic meteorite crash, all dinosaurs became extinct.

As far as Earth was concerned, life went on, developing new species of all shapes and sizes. Finally, one species of hominid evolved into homo sapiens. We have been a separate species perhaps for a million years or more, but as far as "dominating" the earth, that has been partially true only for

the last few thousand years. We proved to be quite adaptable. Most large animals have been domesticated on the path to extinction.

We employed our competitive abilities first to devise strong class systems which would at least ensure that members of our ruling classes could live in relative ease and luxury, even though there was not enough wealth to go around to everyone. Then in just the last few centuries through the invention of relatively free market capitalism and our competitive skills, we have created a world in which living standards improved for many people who were not in the aristocracy or oligarchy. Indeed there are scientists who believe we humans can eliminate all poverty in a few more decades. What a few years ago could have been called a socialist paradise really seemed in reach.

But every good thing has its deleterious side effects. The profit motive meant that any expense that could be postponed or ignored by the companies that produced food, clothing, housing, and luxury items would be ignored. Wealth also created environmental damage: pollution of our air, water, and even our soil. Members of the ruling classes have fiercely resisted efforts to control and even eliminate these side effects. They deny the damage as long as they can do so. Yet even they are

eventually forced to pay a grudging attention to these side effects.

Then has come climate change. The very size of our global economy has caused not only serious environmental problems but now leads to the probability catastrophic global warming. Sea level rises will make many coastal areas unlivable. Fertile areas will become deserts. Clean water will become scarce. Then it is possible that climate change will reach a point of no return, described by some as a tipping point. The climate might make human life impossible.

Humanity has progressed as far as it has because of its intelligence and its successful competition with other species in dominating our planet. We have been able to eliminate many diseases, improved production of food and other resources, and very likely we have the knowledge and resources to keep our climate livable. The question is, will we?

The darkest side of human competition has been warfare. We have fought monstrous wars in the past. Our destructive ability is such that a new world war could easily, especially if nuclear weapons are used, destroy our environment and with it all humankind.

Continued on page 4

Marvin Miller (continued from page 2)

A look at today's economy shows that President Roosevelt was over-optimistic in saying that we have accepted an economic bill of rights. Increasing economic and political inequality have eroded some of the rights we thought we had then. For the foreseeable future, we can expect a continuing struggle to retain the rights – civil, political, and economic – that we still have.

Peter Denison (continued from page 3)

Competition has been very useful in the past. But conditions have changed. When a species is confronted by serious environmental change, it will either adapt or become extinct. We will have to learn to downplay competition and cooperate with each other.

Will we? Many countries, including apparently our own, have enabled backward looking demagogues to

achieve power. We can learn to cooperate, or we can continue defending our individual wealth and privileges up to and including warfare. There is no rule that says humans can't become extinct. The earth will go on. Life of some sort will continue. Planet earth really doesn't care. But we do.

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**THREE**

*A brave poet reveals secrets
we never intend to invoke.
Confessional poets find language
to cast an eye on inner reaches
of anxiety, depression, rebelliousness
as they negotiate the confusion
of urban equality and inequality.
Equality, the Beethoven within us
allergic to power.*

*Confessional poets open the door
to structural realities;
the equality or inequality
that rains on our inmost humanity.*

Elaine Mountleigh

Sunday Programs in January 2017

January 8



**Cheryl Crawford,
Executive Director,
MassVOTE**

*Working for Voter
Engagement in
Massachusetts*

MassVOTE is a grassroots organization that works to increase voter participation and engagement in civic affairs, especially in traditionally low voter communities. In the presidential election of 2016, Mass VOTE organized voter registration, Get Out the Vote efforts, and voter tracking efforts in key MA communities. MassVOTE and Nonprofit VOTE collaborated to win a grant from the Boston Ethical Community. Cheryl will discuss the mission of the organization, the work they do (including upcoming municipal elections), and how BEC might contribute. She'll also reflect on the results of the 2017 election.

January 15

Community Programming

Check the website for updates.

January 22



**Abby Chandler, Associate
Professor, UMass Lowell**

*History and the Bill of
Rights*

December 2016 represented the 225th anniversary of the Bill of Rights. The debates at the Constitutional Convention in

Philadelphia in the summer of 1787, which led to the creation of the Bill of Rights, occurred among men who agreed on some points and profoundly disagreed on others. This talk looks at what caused them to both agree and disagree with one another and to examine how the Bill of Rights acted as a bridge between these differing ideas.

The longstanding American tradition of protecting the rights of individuals in the United States will likely grow ever more crucial in the coming years. This talk examines the history and context of this tradition.

January 29



**Souvana Pou,
Executive Director,
Cambodian Mutual
Assistance
Association of
Lowell**

*Serving the
Cambodian
Community in Lowell*

Who are Cambodian Americans? What is the work of CMAA? What is the future of this community?

The Cambodian Mutual Assistance Organization supports the Cambodian American community and other minorities and economically disadvantaged persons in Lowell, Massachusetts. The goal of the organization is to provide needed services to a population that requires language, economic, social, and educational services, as well as cultural integration and cultural celebration strategies. Souvana Pou will discuss the mission of the organization and the work they do. CMMA was awarded a grant in 2016 from the Boston Ethical Community.

~ Program Schedule for January 2017 ~	
January 8	Cheryl Crawford, Executive Director, MassVOTE <i>Working for Voter Engagement in Massachusetts</i>
January 15	Community Programming <i>Check the website for updates.</i>
January 22	Abby Chandler, Associate Professor, UMass Lowell <i>History and the Bill of Rights</i>
January 29	Souvana Pouy, Executive Director, Cambodian Mutual Assistance Assoc. <i>Serving the Cambodian Community in Lowell</i>
Sunday Meetings are held at 10:30 AM at 33 Garden St in Cambridge	

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