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## The Crisis of American Democracy: The Dying Citizen

I would like to address four issues that reveal a crisis of values in American society. Crises have been percolating in America for some time. Four issues have become especially more problematic since the installment of the Biden administration in 2021. These issues provide an occasion to reflect on certain strengths and weaknesses of American society, including challenges of leadership.

Such reflection is philosophically significant as it bears on the value of citizenship, one of the legacies of Western Civilization. I'm inspired to emphasize the nature and significance of citizenship under the influence of the recent book, *The Dying Citizen*, by Victor Davis Hanson, who is a fellow at the Hoover Institution at Stanford University. Hanson's book is a study about the development of the idea of citizenship. He argues that citizenship is a clarifying principle revealing why Western Civilization, including America, is in decline—hence the title, *The Dying Citizen*.<sup>1</sup> The four issues I will address indicate how citizenship is under threat in America. These issues are Economics, Immigration, Crime, and Education.

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<sup>1</sup> Victor Davis Hanson, *The Dying Citizen* (New York: Basic Books, 2021).

## Economy

A reflection on economics draws one's attention to problematic forces in what is called today the globalist marketplace. Of course, nowadays one cannot dwell on economics without ruminating about inflation, which now troubles America. Of course, American inflation is worrisome not just for Americans but for the entire international community, since the United States owns the default currency (the international exchange rate standard). Unfortunately, the United States is suffering its worst inflationary spell in forty years, which last occurred during the tenure of the Jimmy Carter Presidency (1977–1980), a term of painful memory on account of onerous inflation.

Our current inflationary malaise is frustrating because it need not have happened. Despite the pandemic, the Trump administration never recorded an inflationary period. When Trump left office, inflation was below 3 percent. Now, inflation is approaching 9 percent. The economy began to take a downturn from Joe Biden's first day in office, when by Presidential fiat he put a stop to the Keystone pipeline and oil exploration and leasing. This he accomplished by "Executive Order," a Presidential edict that does not require Congressional approval. Historically, Presidents have exercised Executive Orders sparingly. But Biden has increased the number exponentially. The original Constitutional idea is that an Executive Order would be temporary, a tactical measure to meet some immediate need, deferring to a time when Congress could deliberate the matter. But Biden's agenda is to keep his Orders perpetual to satisfy his base of progressive supporters and donors, an observation that brings to mind Ronald Reagan's humorous remark that "in this world the closest thing to eternity is a temporary government program."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> To date, Biden has announced 104 executive orders. For numbers comparative with past Presidents, see *The American Presidency Project* <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu>.

Biden's policies have negatively influenced inflation. Biden blames Putin for inflation. But the rate of inflation was escalating well before Putin invaded Ukraine. By shutting down the Keystone pipeline and by restricting oil leasing and exploring, gas prices have increased, adding to inflation felt by citizens' fuel needs. Under Trump's guidance, the U.S. had become energy independent. But Biden's policies have discouraged the fossil fuel industry, partly the result of a national and international agenda to replace fossil fuels with green versions of energy. Of course, the development of alternative fuels is an admirable goal but if not managed intelligently economic strains like inflation are likely to result.

Of course, today economic issues are under the influence of globalist agendas, and green energy is certainly a globalist crusade. It is hard to overestimate the impact of globalism on American economics. Today one must appreciate that economics is affected by values that excite globalists. Internationalist interests in economics, not surprisingly, don't give priority to local economics. This is a question of values. It means that economics is no longer constrained by the Christian principle of subsidiarity and accordingly is indifferent to regional markets and local economic eco-systems and even lays waste to customary and national sovereignties, eliminating their charms and traditions.

The transformation of economics from the life of local markets and national interests to international marketplace exchanges is discussed brilliantly in a book titled *Why Liberalism Failed* by Patrick Deneen, a professor of political science at Notre Dame University.<sup>3</sup> By liberalism Deneen refers to the Enlightenment vision of the human person as an atomized, autonomous unencumbered self, an individual unbound by natural relationships, only obligated instead by relationships he or she volunteers to make part of life. This is a view of social

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<sup>3</sup> Patrick Deneen, *Why Liberalism Failed* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 2018).

relations that emanates out of the social contract philosophy of Thomas Hobbes. This Hobbesian idea, Deneen argues, is implicit in globalist free market practices. The free market is rationalized because it purports to be the product of autonomous consumers. Autonomy, self-interest, and voluntarism are championed as the drivers of modernist global economics. Deneen insists that this Hobbesian view of the person isn't just used to rationalize capitalism but also socialism. This is because unchecked autonomy may create social disturbances that require, socialists argue, big government remedies. Accordingly, the dispute between capitalists and socialists is two sides of the same coin, a troubled Hobbesian conception of the human person.

Deneen recognizes that there is always a philosophy of the human person implicit in politics and culture, also in economics. Accordingly, he argues that stresses on modern economies, not just the American economy, are the effects of assumptions about the human condition made fashionable during Renaissance times. Today's economic disturbances are the distant outcomes of a problematic four-hundred-year-old account of the human person. The ideological source of today's economic troubles is an idolatry of the autonomous self, glorified by Hobbes and the social contract theorists.

Deneen cautions that while conservatives romanticize the free market, it has inspired a globalist economy that has many undesirable features. In essence, the problem with modernist globalist economics is that it stems from and continues to exacerbate depersonalization of economic life. Depersonalization follows because there is more to being a person than an atomic, voluntaristic individual. Economics in at least some modest measure ought to retain a commitment to natural social relations captured in Aristotle's original meaning of economics, from the Greek word *oikos*, referring to the household, implying family relations, which Aristotle thought was the true source of society, not voluntaristic contractual associations. Of course, the literal household of an ancient Greek *polis* doesn't

exactly fit modern life. But at least analogically, there must be a regional regard for and even protection of a people's national and more local economic sovereignty for economics to be fully human. Once swept up into globalist impersonal markets, rationalized in name of the "free market," a society's unique cultural identities can be ignored and eroded.

A case in point is the harm caused by leaders who benefit from uncritical homage to Chinese economic influence, thanks in part to Richard Nixon securing a relationship with Mao Zedong in the late nineteen sixties. Values matter, and as Michael Pillsbury has explained in exquisite detail in his book *The Hundred-Year Marathon*, China has overtly declared its intention to replace other contenders, like the United States, and become the world's next superpower. Pillsbury recalls a formal meeting, which took place about forty years ago, in which the Chinese debated the question, "What should be the Chinese strategy for developing their aim to be the replacement superpower?" Pillsbury answers that the Chinese leaders decided they would not primarily endeavor to create their own infrastructure by means of creativity, entrepreneurship, and technological inventiveness. Instead, their brazen policy would be to simply appropriate it from other countries. America and other countries court Chinese influence and economic benefit but at cost to their vigilance and values.<sup>4</sup>

While Chinese economic machinations are often nefarious, Westerners often tolerate them in the name of the free market. Even ordinary citizens parrot the mantra that the free-market redeems evils. For example, my nephew told me that he praised American sports programs, like the National Basketball Association, for making China its major television market. I told him that The NBA makes a lot of its money, in the billions, by marketing products that are manufactured by Uighurs,

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<sup>4</sup> Michael Pillsbury, *The Hundred-Year Marathon: China's Secret Strategy to Replace America as the Global Superpower* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2016).

Chinese Muslim slaves forced to live in labor camps. He didn't believe me. He later reported that he fact-checked what I said about the Uighurs, whom he had never heard of, and concluded that my charge was baseless. But, to the contrary, this kind of servitude is confirmed by many sources. The point is that it is excused too often because, in Orwellian terms, it is the "free market" at work!<sup>5</sup>

Anyway, the depersonalization of modern economic life, arguably a collateral damage of unbridled free global markets suggests a potential crisis in American economics, and arguably a crisis for Western Civilization in general.

## Illegal Immigration

Another effect of globalism is indifference to national borders, encouraging and excusing illegal immigration. Once again, this kind of policy and practice is encouraged by a certain interpretation of the free market. Unconstrained immigration is another by-product of the liberal, libertarian conviction that autonomy gives one the right to ignore borders. Borderlessness, Deneen argues, is a by-product of Hobbesian liberalism. In other words, national borders violate our social contractarian rights of autonomy and liberty. No government has the right to fence me in. In other words, if boundaries are understood to be some violation of voluntarism and autonomy, then boundaries are morally unacceptable (especially if morality is simply a matter of a voluntary social contract). An enlightened citizen should not regard himself as a citizen of this or that nation state but as a citizen of the world.

This principle of borderlessness gives politicians an excuse to ignore, if not encourage, illegal immigration. This is an ide-

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<sup>5</sup> See Vox.com, September 25, 2020, Jen Kirby. [https://vox.com/labor\\_Xingang](https://vox.com/labor_Xingang). Also see [uyghumextgen.org](http://uyghumextgen.org), on the Uygher nextgen project.

ology that partly explains the inundation of illegal immigrants crossing the U.S.-Mexican border, immigrants that have migrated from 160 different countries. Americans are an accommodating people, historically open to immigration, provided it is legal. In fact, legal immigration to America is remarkably generous. Over one million immigrants are allowed legally to enter American borders annually, an influx of legal immigrants that outnumber all the other legal immigrants allowed in all the other countries in the world combined. Arguments that America is xenophobic or exclusionary have no basis. So, why the present administration's indifference to enforce its border? The answer seems cynical but true: Democrats gamble that an inundation of illegal migrants will affect demographics such that the incoming migrants can soon get the right to vote and will vote for Democrats. Hence, the cynic's quip that illegal immigrants might as well be called "Undocumented Democrats." This hope is reinforced by the Democrats giving aid to immigrants upon trying to enter the country, including tickets of transport to different parts of the country.

The statistics reinforce the complaint that the immigrant influx has become an invasion. So far this year, border patrol and customs officials' encounters with illegal aliens amount to 2,378,944. Double that number and the sum is how many illegals have entered America since Biden took office January 2021. When asked, illegals credit Biden for permission to enter the country. The open border is a Biden policy. He owns it, a fact that sharply contrasts with Donald Trump's success at the border. During his tenure the border was more secure than it had been in four decades, despite his inability to convince Congress to fund building a border wall. In contrast to Trump's border success, Biden's failure has provoked the ire of Republicans and many Democrats alike, including Hispanic citizens who resent the persistent media pronouncement that Hispanic citizens support illegal immigration because they share an ethnic kinship with other Hispanics. This lie has begun to fester among Hispanics, inspiring many to leave the

Democrat Party. Hispanics too wonder how a country can exist without honoring its border.

Comparative numbers reveal the escalation of illegal aliens. Border Patrol and Customs authorities report that in September of this year, 227,547 illegals crossed the southern border. In September of 2021, it was 192,000. In September of 2020, 57,634 entered. For September of 2019, the total was 52,546. Among these numbers are 98 apprehensions who are named on the international terrorist watchlist.<sup>6</sup> In addition, last month 67,000 migrants entered the country without being identified at the border. In other words, they have successfully been smuggled into the country undetected. Moreover, a disturbing figure is that 856 immigrants have died crossing the border, a statistic that undercuts the Democrats' claim that they are the party of empathy.

Lack of empathy brings to mind another outrage: the horrendous influx of deadly drugs across the border, finding their way into all fifty American states, evoking the repeated remark that "every state is now a border state." Where is the empathy for Americans, most of them young, who fall prey to the drug merchants organized by the Mexican cartels? On October 20, in the border town of Nogales, Arizona, the police captured 85,000 Fentanyl pills, along with 114 pounds of Methamphetamine. On the same day, a second capture confiscated 47,000 Fentanyl pills and eight pounds of Methamphetamine. The Fentanyl alone in these two captures could kill over one-hundred million Americans.

## Crime

A third issue is that America is being swamped by a crime wave. Major American cities are led by Democrats, while less populated and rural areas tend to be Republican strongholds. Since

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<sup>6</sup> Josh Kelly, Associated Press. [https://apnews.com oct 27, 2022.](https://apnews.com/oct-27-2022)



the crime wave is localized in major cities, many citizens are blaming Democrat leaders for policies and leaders who have failed to limit criminal activity. According to a recent Fox News Poll, 79% of American citizens are very concerned about rates of crime. They are wonderstruck as they witness public prosecutors, magistrates, and mayors release criminals back on the streets with "no cash bail" program. Criminal-apprehension-and-release is like a revolving door, often with offenders having a long record of committing crimes. Even criminals who commit heinous crimes are often released the same day back on the streets, especially in Los Angeles, Chicago, Philadelphia, New York, and Chicago, where magistrates indifferent to the suffering of crime victims rationalize their convicts' release as enlightened policy, on account of their Marxist ideology, an ideology Marxists call "equity," the idea that since some people are disadvantaged by social injustice, society has an obligation to restore some justice by bending the rule of law, applying it differently, favoring some groups over others. In effect, this Marxist ideology holds that the true victims of crime are the criminals themselves. The actual crime victims are a kind of collateral damage in the pursuit of restorative justice. This kind of policy echoes Vladimir Lenin's view that the proletariat cannot really commit crimes because they lack moral agency. Their sense of autonomy and responsibility has been stripped away because of the systemic injustice of bourgeoisie power. This is the kind of Marxist rationalization which makes evil people victims, turning them into objects of sympathy, while the interests of good, law-abiding citizens are ignored.

Of course, what lies behind this Marxist attitude of depraved indifference is a failed account of the human person. As Saint John Paul the Great understood, a civilized society must rest upon a sound philosophy of the human person, which holds the individual morally responsible, because of implicit dignity, freedom, reason, and social obligation.

The crime statistics are disturbing. Here is a sample from the city of Philadelphia: ABC News reports that to date this year

there have been 1, 916 shootings in the City of Brotherly Love. Homicides as of this month number 420. Similarly, high rates of crime plague many cities across America. Since one of the essential functions of a government is to keep citizens safe, this plague of crime is a genuine crisis, denying citizens their right to live peacefully, securely, and productively.

## Education

Fourthly. conservative Americans have been awakened and are inspired to pay attention to the education system as never before. During the pandemic parents got to observe their children's virtual classroom. In many cases, they were appalled by what they saw. They discovered that students weren't being educated so much as being indoctrinated. Cultural Marxist propaganda was evident in the classroom and in curricula. Cultural Marxism in the form of Critical Race Theory, a racialized and pernicious version of Frankfurt School Critical Theory, has been poisoning the minds of American students, trying to teach them to hate America and Western Civilization. A means to these outcomes is the cultivation of an institutionalized bigotry against white people, championed in the writings of Ibram X. Kendi, Robin DiAngelo, and many others.

Generations ago Marxists figured out that if educators corrupt the schools, they can transform society. This has become a kind of policy and practice among American educators, especially with the approval, sometimes explicit, sometimes tacit, of the Teachers' Unions. Part of their aim is to change the civil society by undermining the traditional Judeo-Christian morality. Additionally, they seek to subvert esteem for the nuclear family, in accord with Marx's aim prescribed in *The Communist Manifesto*. To accomplish this, there are no boundaries of debauchery, depravity, and deconstruction that some educators will not breach.

Taboos that would have applied even in the recent past are being tossed aside. Now, there is talk among educators to nor-

malize pedophilia, calling pedophiles “Minor Attracted Persons” (=MAPS). This rationalization occurs as Leftists manipulate language, which is their strategy of choice to obscure their social harms. In his book, *Speechless*, Michael Knowles explains in detail how this nomenclature game is played. An example is how the Left manipulated language about abortion: it was first called abortion; then it became the pro-choice movement; lastly it became women’s reproductive health.<sup>7</sup>

Today, hosts of parents have been awakened by efforts to sexualize their children in the name of education. Explicit sex literature is now routine content in schools, even for children of very early ages. An outrageous fashion is what educators call “Drag Queen Story Hour,” in which schools sponsor transvestites to “entertain” children, some of them at the earliest primary-school age, all in the name of sex education. What used to be called vile corruption of children is now celebrated as an enlightened form of sex education. When parents complain, the education establishment dismisses them, declaring that educators know better than parents how to rear children.<sup>8</sup>

The good news is that this kind of outrage has awakened parents across the country. Parents have become a movement unto themselves, demanding that society restore its respect for parental rights, integrity of the family, and innocence of children. The Biden Justice Department has become worried about the discontent of parents, so much so that they have weaponized the FBI, declaring that some parents are Domestic Terrorists!

These issues indicate that many Americans are demoralized about their standing as citizens, a consideration that inspired

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<sup>7</sup> Michael Knowles, *Speechless* (Washington, D.C., Regnery Publishing, 2021), pp. 239–249.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 188–190; p. 218. Also see *Washington Times.com*, June 16, 2022, “New York Mayor Backs City-Funded Drag Queen Story Hour for School Children.” Also see, <https://wpde.com/news/nation-world/nyc-politicians-mayor>.

Victor Davis Hanson's monograph, *The Dying Citizen*. The citizen is witnessing the effects of globalist economics with its undermining of the middle class. The citizen is being replaced by an immigrant population that will change America. Citizens worry they will be victims of rampant crime. Citizens worry for the future of their children and grandchildren as they are subjected to Marxist and degrading indoctrination in the schools.

Citizens somehow need to find a way to take their country back. ■