

LIFE AMONG THE RUINS

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American society is facing three

existential crises not unlike those that overcame the late Roman, and a millennium later, terminal Byzantine, empires.

Premodern Barbarism

We are suffering an epidemic of premodern barbarism. The signs unfortunately appear everywhere. Over half a million homeless people crowd our big-city downtowns.

Most know the result of such Medieval street living is unhealthy, violent, and lethal for all concerned. Yet no one knows—or even seems to worry about—how to stop it.

So public defecation, urination, fornication, and injection continue unabated. Progressive urban pedestrians pass by holding their noses, averting their gazes, and accelerating the pace of their walking. *The greenest generation in history allows its sidewalks to become pre-civilizational sewers.*

In a very brief time, we all but have destroyed the downtowns of our major cities—which will increasingly become vacant in a manner like the 6th-century A.D. Roman forum.

All accept that defunding the police, no-cash bail, Soros-funded district attorneys, and radical changes in jurisprudence have destroyed deterrence. The only dividend is the unleashing of a criminal class to smash-and-grab, carjack, steal, burglarize, execute, and assault—with *de facto* immunity.

Instead we are lectured that looting is not a crime, but lengthy incarceration *is* criminally immoral.

We have redefined felonies as misdemeanors warranting no punishment. Misdemeanors are now infractions that are not criminal. Infractions we treat as lifestyle choices. *Normality, not criminality, is deemed criminal.* We all know this will not work, but still wonder why it continues.

Many among the middle classes of our cities who can flee or move, do so—like 5th-century equestrians who left

Rome for rural fortified farms before the onslaught of the Ostrogoths and Visigoths.

For most of our lives we were lectured that the old southern states—Florida, Tennessee, Texas—were backward and uninviting. Now even liberals often flee to them, leaving behind supposedly cosmopolitan Seattle, Portland, San Francisco, Chicago, Baltimore, and New York.

The more people leave the blue states, the more those states praise themselves as utopian. The less well-off, without the means to leave, hope that their environs have hit bottom so things can only improve.

The elite who caused this premodern catastrophe assumes they will always have the money and wherewithal to ensure that themselves and their own can navigate around or even profit from the barbarism they unleashed. For them the critic, not the target of criticism, is the greater threat.

The hard urban work of the 1990s and early 2000s—cleaner, safer subways, secure nightlife downtown, clean sidewalks, low vacancy rates, little vagrancy, and litter-free streets—so often has been undone, *deliberately* so.

A mere 10 years ago, if an American learned that a man was arrested for clubbing, robbing, or shooting innocents, and yet would be released from custody that day of his crime, he would have thought it an obscenity. Now he fears that often the criminal will not even be arrested.

A once secure border no longer exists. Joe Biden and Alejandro Mayorkas simply demolished it and allowed 6-7 million foreign nationals to cross illegally into the United States without audits—to the delight of their apparent constituent, Mexico President Andrés Manuel López Obrador.

What would shame a Biden or Mayorkas? What would change their minds? Billions of dollars spent on social services for the lawbreaking at the expense of the American poor?

Would 100,000 annual lethal overdoses—12 times more than those who died over 20 years in Iraq and Afghanistan combined—from drugs that flow across the open border sway them? Or would it take 200,000, or 300,000 deaths before Joe Biden relented and ceased his chuckling?

What does a people do when its highest officials simply renounce their oaths of office and refuse to enforce laws they don't like? Everyone knows the border will eventually have to become secure, but none have any idea whether it will take another 20, 30, or 50 million illegal entrants and 1 million more fentanyl deaths to close it.

Polls show race relations have hit historic lows. Much of the ecumenicalism of the post-Civil Rights movement seems squandered—*deliberately* so.

The Left now rarely mentions Martin Luther King, Jr. or even the historic Civil Rights Act of 1964. Perhaps it knows it has violated the spirit and legacy of both.

Today, our identity politics leaders believe that the color of our skin, not the content of our character, certainly matters more.

The practitioners of the new tribalism in some sense fear outlawing segregation and discrimination by race. They know to do so would end racially restricted houses and safe spaces, racially exclusive graduations, and race-based admissions, hiring, and promotion on campus.

Read Professor Ibram X. Kendi and his message is implicit. For him, the problem with a Jim Crow-like system was not segregation or racial chauvinism *per se*, but merely who was doing the victimizing and who were the victims: so the original racism was bad; but racism in reverse is good.

We abhor violence, racism, and misogyny—in the abstract. Yet the entire hip-hop industry would find no audience—or so we are told by its appeasers—if rappers refrained from “ho” misogyny, brags of violence against law enforcement, and self-described proprietary use of the N-word.

Most know that young black males under 30 commit violent crimes at well over 10 times their 3-4 percent demographic of the population—so often victimizing the nonwhite. All know that reality must remain unmentionable even as its causes need to be debated and discussed if lives are to be saved.

Yet the greater crime seems not the crime itself, but even mentioning crime.

Postmodern Abyss

Postmodernism in our age is deadlier even than premodernism. Sexually explicit drag shows that allow the attendance of little children 20 years ago would have been outlawed—by liberals worried over the trauma of the young watching performance-art simulated sex.

Now *the children come last* and the performers first—as ratified by the same liberals. But to fathom the new transitioning, simply learn from ancient transitioning and gender dysphoria, an unhappy classical theme from Catullus’ Attis poem (*stimulatus ibi furenti rabie, vagus/ devolsit ili acuto sibi pondera silice/ itaque ut relictasensit sibi membra sine viro*) to Giton in Petronius’ *Satyricon*.

Current “science” is now synonymous with ideology, religion, or superstition. Lockdowns, mRNA vaccinations, masking, transgenderism, “climate change,” and green power brook no dissent. They are declared scientifically correct in the manner that the sun used to revolve around the earth, and any dissenting Galileo or Copernicus is cancel-cultured, doxxed, and deplatformed.

It is now verboten to cite the causes of the current upswing. We must remain silent about the classical exegeses that cults, pornography, and constructed sexual identities, when not biological, were the manifestations of a bored culture’s affluence (*luxus*), leisure (*otium*), and decadence (*licentia/dissolutio*).

The classical analyses of an elite collapse focus on a falling birth rate, a scarce labor force, ubiquitous abortion, an undermanned military, and a shrinking population. We suffer all that and perhaps more still.

Millions of young men are detached and ensconced in solitude, their indebted 20s too often consumed with video-gaming, internet surfing, or consumption of porn. Many suffer from *prolonged adolescence*. Many assume that they are *immune from criticism*, given that the alternative of getting married, having children, finding a full-time job, and buying a house is society’s *new abnormal*.

Rarely has an elite society become so Victorian and yet so raunchy. A slip with an anachronistic “Gal” or “Honey” can get one fired. Meanwhile, grabbing one’s genitals while pregnant on stage before 120 million viewers is considered a successful Super Bowl extravaganza.

Our army is short of its annual recruitment by 25 percent. We all suspect but do not say out loud the cause. The stereotyping of poor and middle-class white males as both raging and biased, and yet expected to fight and die in misadventures in Afghanistan and Iraq, has finally convinced the parents of these 18-year-olds to say, “no more.”

Need we say anything about the lack of efficacy or morality of the Department of Justice, FBI, or CIA?

Or rather is there anything the FBI will *not* do? Doctor court evidence? Hire Twitter to suppress the news? Monitor parents at school board meetings? Allow directors to lie under oath or “misremember” before Congress?

Swiping clean subpoenaed phones? Hiring fakers to compile dirt on a presidential candidate—and then using that known smear to hoodwink a judge to allow spying on Americans?

Suppressing evidence on a laptop to warp an election? Raiding an ex-president’s home with a SWAT-like team? Spying on Catholics in mass? Storming a home full of children of a man accused of a politically incorrect misdemeanor? All this and more is today’s FBI.

The more the military has been stalemated in Iraq, humiliated in Afghanistan, and dreading what China will soon do or what Iran will even sooner let off, the more it insists our priorities should be diversity, equity, and inclusion. Will that escapism ensure more lethal pilots, tank commanders, and Marine company commanders?

The mindsets of too many of our new generations of command are twofold: first is to be promoted by virtue signaling woke policies that they must know eventually will hamper combat readiness, and then in the future to rotate at retirement into multimillionaire status by leveraging past expertise for defense contractors.

Keep that in mind and almost every publicly uttered nonsense from our highest in the Pentagon makes perfect sense.

Them

There is a third challenge. Our enemies—illiberal, deadly, and vengeful—have concluded we are more effective critics of ourselves than are they. They enjoy our divided nation, torn apart by racial incivility, dysfunctional cities, and woke madness.

(Notice how even the communists long ago dropped deadly Maoist wokeism, or how the Russians viewed the Soviet commissariat as antithetical to their military and economic agendas.)

Iran believes that this present generation of Americans would likely allow it to nuke Israel rather than stop its proliferation. China assumes that Taiwan is theirs and the only rub is how to destroy or absorb it without losing too many global markets and income. Russia conjectures that the more we trumpet its impending defeat, the more it will destroy Eastern Ukraine and call such a desert peace.

Our “friends” can be as dangerous as our enemies. A visitor from another world might conclude Mexico has done more damage to America than North Korea, Iran, and Russia combined.

Mexico has, by intent, flooded our border with 20 million illegal aliens. It has allowed cartels with Chinese help to conduct multibillion-dollar profiteering by killing 100,000 Americans per year (did the Kremlin ever match that tally in a half century of the Cold War?).

Mexico drains \$60 billion from its expatriates on the expectation that American subsidies will free up their cash to be sent home. The more the cartels run wild, the more money trickles down—while their top drug enforcement official Genaro García Luna was found guilty in a New York courtroom for collusion with the cartels.

How did all of this so quickly erode our once great country?

Our crisis was not the next generation of foreign Hitlers and Stalins. It was not earthquakes, floods, or even pandemics. It was not endemic poverty and want. It was not a meager inheritance from past generations of incompetents. Nor was it a dearth of natural resources or bounty.

Instead our catastrophe arose from our most highly educated, the wealthiest and most privileged in American history with the greatest sense of self-esteem and sanctimoniousness. Sometime around the millennium, they felt their genius could change human nature and bring an end to history—if only they had enough power to force *hoi polloi* to follow their abstract and bankrupt theories that they had no intention of abiding by themselves.

And then the few sowed the wind, and so the many now reap their whirlwind.

Victor Davis Hanson is an American military historian, author, classics professor emeritus, and scholar of ancient warfare. He is currently the Martin and Illie Anderson Senior Fellow at Stanford University's Hoover Institution.

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