

I'm Glad to Live in 'Stupid America'

Perspective #73 John Teevan February 6, 2007 (Slightly rev. Jan 24, '25)

We hear that the chief problem in America is the dogmatism of the mean-spirited haves who live off others and who have rigid morals they want to force on the have nots. There are two Americas; the smart leaders like to think of these mean-spirited folks as Stupid America. Smart America's ideas have become 'the way things are'... they have become cultural norms.

The 2007 Super Bowl was played between the Chicago Bears and the Indy Colts in a way that typified the two Americas at least according to the media. Of two black coaches who were oppressed (etc.), one was going to stand for his race (etc.), and win. When the game turned out it was a more of a family values game as if it were, "Win it for your Momma!"

The official agenda of the *Two Americas* was missing and while no one is going to portray either team as Puritans, the winning Colts not only gave credit to God, as the Bears would have, but they knelt and prayed with their Christian coach Tony Dungy, as the Bears' Christian coach Lovie Smith would have. The media folks managed to refrain from calling them hicks.

Here in Stupid America, we could only see two coaches that were good coaches. Our eyes were mostly appropriately as concerned about race as M.L. King or baseball's Branch Ricky would have wanted. The faith of the coaches was not news as many other Christian coaches have led their teams in the past making almost anyone think of Tom Landry. What happened to the script of 'the great black coach'?

Smart America is as blinded to the real world by their orthodoxy as were the medieval bishops. Three recent authors in their recent books are both insightful and even statistically supported. Smart America will likely neglect these authors.

They describe Two Americas that have different dividing lines not between rich and poor but between the 'Smart America' of the elites and the 'Stupid America' that I live in. None of the three aspects of that dividing line are racial, class, or even economic lines. Here are three dividing lines.

1. The Dividing Line between the Married and Unmarried parents. 'Smart America' has failed to see the distinction between the two sides of what Kay Hymowitz calls the Marriage Gap. In fact, they refuse to see it because for them marriage is not an arena of responsibility but an arena of personal rights. Only one America sees that it is important for parents to commit to "The Mission – the project of shaping children into adults who have the requisite skills and self-discipline to prosper in a complex society" (Wall Street Journal, 12/13/06).

"Marriage orders life in ways that we only dimly understand. It carries with it signals about how we should live, signals that are in line with both our economics and our politics in the largest sense." Guess what? There is more marriage among the better educated people with high incomes. Why? "(t)he urban poor have lost the 'life script' for future-oriented child rearing."

Smart America assumes that the problem is income, but Hymowitz believes that "the problem is more existential, a loss of a sense that marriage and children are connected." The evidence includes studies that count the number of words that children hear from their parents: 2,150/hour for a professor's children, 1,250 for working parents, and a mere 620 for non-working parents and those 620 words are often sentence fragments and even demeaning.

Hymowitz's book is *Marriage and Caste in America* (Ivan Dee: 2006), and in it she discredits the wrong understanding of the problem. This explains why, while Smart America has generously spent about \$28 trillion of tax money since LBJ to lift the poor, the results have been meager. Meanwhile, McDonald's and Wal*mart created about three million jobs for mostly poor workers while helping everyone, including the poor to eat and shop for nearly everything more cheaply. There are many black voices that are raised in hopes of equal opportunity in America, they are the parents who understand 'the script.' They prefer school choice to government cash.

2. The Dividing Line between the Angry Observers and the Upbeat Workers. Stupid Americans are polite, grateful, protective, and respectful without apologizing for holding such silly values in a world of smart cynics. They are tolerant to the point of passivity even when called racists and worse. They are serious, humane, and hopeful. They are as inclined to be as helpful as New Yorkers to each other after 9/11 without requiring a 9/11. They do not need what Peggy Noonan called "the BlackBerryed gargoyles

who tell them how to think and where to stand,” because they are not strategic, they are not poll driven. They commit; they are sincere. (Wall Street Journal 11/4/06, P14).

The great secret, as expressed by Bruce Brohnen is that even the American secularists are Christian secularists (Wall Street Journal 8/12/07 P9). The chief values of ‘Smart America’ are *compassion and justice*, which are the essential virtues of the New and Old Testaments, respectively. These two are found, as a pair, nowhere else in the world except in Christianity, and now they are the defining norms, minus Jesus, of the secular left. Does this make them the Christian left. Go figure.

The upbeat workers go to church on Sunday and then get up on Monday and go to work; they even go to Iraq. They refuse to get angry even though they are treated as the real enemies of America. They are accused of having the ideas (and crusades) that have infuriated Islam as if liberal views on abortion and pornography represent Islamic ideals. Stupid Americans may oppose the secularists; they may vote, but so far, they are too productive and devoted to their families to get distracted or agitated.

3. The Dividing Line between the Givers and the Give-nots Another dividing line lies between those who talk (like the religious guy in the parable) and those who actually help (like the good Samaritan). What those who act lack is confidence that the government is likely to solve social issues. They are as skeptical of the Great Society as they should have been about Prohibition. Arthur C. Brooks wrote *Who Really Cares* (Basic 2006) on this topic.

In his book Brooks tells his story about a liberal political candidate whose campaign he had managed years ago. “If I’m ever hit by a car, I sure hope the next guy to come along will be a conservative,” the candidate said. He explained, “A liberal will blame the unsafe conditions of the highways, blame budget cuts, and keep driving. A conservative will get out of his car and help.” (Wall Street Journal, 8/06). His point is that ‘Smart America’ may talk a lot and accuse Stupid America, but Smart America is not generous even though they may have created the opposite impression.

Brooks says that the line of separation “most saliently is not between the haves and have-nots, but between the givers and give-nots, between those who respond to social needs with their own money and time and those who do not.” Brooks did an empirical study that revealed conclusions he was not immediately prepared to accept. He found four characteristics of people who actually “behave charitably: religion, skepticism about the government’s role in economic life, strong families, and personal entrepreneurship.” Those who “worship regularly are 25% more likely to give and 23% more likely to volunteer. They give 400% of what their secular counterparts give.”

Smart America highly favors government enforced solutions while Stupid America hesitates. Stupid Americans, like my friend Dan ****, are making their fifth, sixth, and seventh trips down to Gulfport to help with Katrina victims while Smart Americans are doing what they do.

I live in Stupid America.

I join super coaches Lovie Smith and Tony Dungy in thanking God.