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Editor's Notebook: A Political Reality Check

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Editor's Notebook

A Political Reality Check



Every electoral campaign for the White House there is the inevitable blame game played by the candidates as they regularly point out what they claim are the evils that are contributing to the downfall of this country and the evildoers who are complicit in this downfall. This presidential election is no different. If you listen to the endless speechifying of the Democrats and Republican hopefuls that started over a year ago you will find a common list of the sources of national decline. Since it's my job to listen to this speechifying and then try and make sense of it to my students, here is a list of the usual suspects in this year's presidential race:

- The oil companies
- Financial speculators
- Hollywood
- The Federal Reserve
- Illegal Immigrants
- The NAFTA agreement
- Congressional spending
- The tax code
- The super rich

And last but not least President George W. Bush

Now with each one of these popular evils and evildoers there is certainly a nugget of blame that is well deserved. The fact that we as a nation are currently in the dumps is in part the result of the miscalculation, the incompetence, the ineffectiveness, the selfishness, the greed and the excess of these ten suspects. But they are not the whole story; in fact they are only partial contributors to the current malaise. There are far more central reasons why we are in a down period, and perhaps in a permanent decline. No matter what the politicians say about what's wrong with this country, here's a list of the real evils and evildoers that are at the core of our national problems.

We love the Chinese—they make just about everything we use, they are a major cause of skyrocketing gas prices, and they are the real reason for our job losses and the decline of the dollar, yet we treat them as our valued friend; some friend.

A \$1 trillion war in Iraq—Can you just imagine what we could do with that money on the domestic front? One hour of the war costs an estimated \$46 million, with that money from just that one hour we could im-

prove, repair and modernize 20 schools in this country. Talk about mixed up priorities.

Credit card debt—Worldwide it is currently \$5.2 trillion and we in the United States contribute 40% of that debt. The average personal credit card debt is over \$6,700. Whatever happened to pinching pennies? Wouldn't it be better to put money into the bank every once and awhile, rather than splurge on that wide screen television?

An aversion to paying taxes—For some strange reason we have bought into the view that ignoring paying for schools, bridges, scientific research, and health care is good national policy. Investing in public goods is what civilized societies do in order to make life better. We on the other hand would rather put tax money in our pockets and watch as our quality of life deteriorates.

The Britney Spears effect—We live in a popular culture that is inane and insane, as a result we live in a nation where ignorance is cool and the lives of B-list starlets are of great social importance. Are our lives so vacant that we get pleasure from watching people destroy themselves? There is a simple solution—read a book.

Washington is broken—But remember, we elected Washington.

Income inequality—One of the richest nations on the earth and we have over 37 million people in poverty and worse yet, Americans were surprised and shocked to see that poor people lived in New Orleans. Isn't it time we spent some of our energy and resources to close the poverty gap?

It's all about me—We have become a nation that thrives on a stubborn refusal to make the sacrifices to save this country. Why do we cling to the belief that bigger is better, and what's so great about our passion to buy more "stuff"?

We hate the government—Yes, government is intrusive and too often stupid, but as the last few years have proven, if we don't have government then what we get is an economy that is run for self-interest not national interest, regular rip-offs of the consumer and an army of foreclosures, bankruptcies and workers living on the margins.

In the old comic strip Pogo, the wise reptile says "I have seen the enemy and it is us." Before we buy into our politicians playing the blame game and pointing fingers, we should first look at ourselves. Maybe, just maybe, we are the problem.

—Michael Kryzaneck, Editor.