

Living In A Culture of Delusion, Denial and Ignorance

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What do we have a right to know? In this web-based age, where we can Google almost everything, you'd think we would be better informed than we are.

We have Freedom of Information laws and a President who has promised transparency, offering some details on what he's doing on an easy to access website.

Yet, there is much more that we still don't know, and maybe never will

At long last, a report on CIA abuse of detainees came out, but years after the fact, and in a heavily "redacted" form—i.e censored. Already the prosecutor chosen to prosecute says there's not enough information there to do so. Duh?

The Presidents "Pay Czar" is afraid to release what he's found out about corporate compensation for fear it might lead, heaven forbid, to naming "targets of populist anger."

Reuters reports, "Kenneth Feinberg has said he is uncertain how much information will be made public. Privacy laws and fears that highly compensated executives will become targets for populist anger argue for limiting such disclosure.

"Feinberg, speaking on Martha's Vineyard on August 16 in his only public remarks since becoming President Obama's point-man on executive pay, called the issue of disclosure "a serious problem."

"There is a tension between not wanting to put on the front page of every newspaper in the country the specific compensation packages of these individuals ... versus the public's right to know," he said."

What are they afraid of? Apparently, embarrassing protest. Here's the worry cited: an earlier disclosure sparked criticism of Treasury Secretary Timothy Geithner "and prompted left-leaning groups to organize bus tours to visit the homes of AIG employees."

OMG, Oh no!

Sometimes the scales of justice tip in the public's direction. A judge is ordering the Federal Reserve Bank to reveal information it has insisted on keeping secret. That's a good thing.

Bloomberg reports, "Manhattan Chief U.S. District Judge Loretta Preska rejected the central bank's argument that the records aren't covered by the law because their disclosure would harm borrowers' competitive positions. The collateral lists "are central to understanding and

assessing the government's response to the most cataclysmic financial crisis in America since the Great Depression," according to the lawsuit that led to yesterday's ruling.' No doubt the Bank will appeal!

The absence of information, pervasive media misinformation and the spin control exercised by powerful lobbies influences what people know, think, and think about. Or, more likely, don't think about!

It gets even worse when people cling to beliefs even when they are not true, as if there is a need to believe, facts be damned.

James Howard Kuntsler has been tracking the financial decline. He writes, "The key to the current madness, of course, is this expectation, this wish, really, that all the rackets, games, dodges, scams, and workarounds that American banking, business, and government devised over the past thirty years - to cover up the dismal fact that we produce so little of real value these days - will just magically return to full throttle, like a machine that has spent a few weeks in the repair shop. This is not going to happen, of course."

Sounds right, but will people who so want the economy to miraculously bounce back accept this reality or do they prefer ambiguity and denial?

A new study even says that many of us lean towards comfortable truths, and reject uncomfortable ones.

One Journal reports: "In a study published in the most recent issue of the journal Sociological Inquiry, sociologists from four major research institutions focus on one of the most curious aspects of the 2004 presidential election: the strength and resilience of the belief among many Americans that Saddam Hussein was linked to the terrorist attacks of 9/11. Although this belief influenced the 2004 election, they claim it did not result from pro-Bush propaganda, but from an urgent need by many Americans to seek justification for a war already in progress.

"The findings may illuminate reasons why some people form false beliefs about the pros and cons of health-care reform or regarding President Obama's citizenship, for example.

"The study, "There Must Be a Reason: Osama, Saddam and Inferred Justification" calls such unsubstantiated beliefs "a serious challenge to democratic theory and practice" and considers how and why it was maintained by so many voters for so long in the absence of supporting evidence."

So, our culture not only forges consciousness but also manufactures false consciousness.

Take the idea of equality. We think our country is embracing more equality when, in fact, facts point in another direction, i.e, towards greater and greater economic inequality.

Writing in the London Review of Books. Walter Benn Michaels challenges our illusions on this issue in an essay on "Who Cares about the White Working Class?" edited by Kjartan Páll Sveinsson:

"An obvious question, then, is how we are to understand the fact that we've made so much progress in some areas while going backwards in others. And an almost equally obvious

answer is that the areas in which we've made progress have been those which are in fundamental accord with the deepest values of neoliberalism, and the one where we haven't isn't.

"We can put the point more directly by observing that increasing tolerance of economic inequality and increasing intolerance of racism, sexism and homophobia – of discrimination as such – are fundamental characteristics of neoliberalism. Hence the extraordinary advances in the battle against discrimination, and hence also its limits as a contribution to any left-wing politics. The increased inequalities of neoliberalism were not caused by racism and sexism and won't be cured by – they aren't even addressed by – anti-racism or anti-sexism....

"Thus the primacy of anti-discrimination not only performs the economic function of making markets more efficient, it also performs the therapeutic function of making those of us who have benefited from those markets sleep better at night."

The truth is: we continue to live a world of delusions. See Chris Hedges new Book, Empire of Illusion for more detail.

The fight for transparency and more information is critical, but it has to be accompanied by an effort to explain "the facts" and connect the dots. That's the only way to find truth.

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