

Miscellany 6: Shall I Continue?; Hubbert's Peak; Jessica Williams; A Country Filled with Spies; Bush Suggests War on Terror Cannot Be Won; Bertrand Russell and Neale Donald Walsch; The Way of the Warrior; Culture Change; What's In a Name?

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Commentary on the past month's news and reading.

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Shall I Continue?

When I started the Foundation website in 1999, it received very few visitors – about three a day during the week, and none on the weekends. Over time, as I have added more material to the site and it has been noticed by search engines, the number of visitors and hits increased very much. A few months ago, however, the rate of increase in the number of hits seemed to be peaking. I tried resubmitting the site to the major search engines, but this did not make much difference.

In the early 1980s, my wife and I opened a ladies-wear-fashion store, Sonora Fashions, in Tucson, Arizona (clothes, jewelry, accessories, baskets, and the like). We had never done this sort of thing before, but we enjoyed traveling to foreign countries and buying, and it seemed as if this would be a fun thing to do. The way that we approached it, however, was not very good. We enjoyed traveling to the foreign countries and buying, but because of limited time, we did not do this very often. As a result, our store received a small number of large shipments.

The first few weeks went great. People really liked our things. But then, after a few weeks, when no new shipments arrived, our customers would say, "Where's the new stuff?" They wanted to drop by the store every week, and see new things similar to (but different from) what we had. Well, the only practical way for a small shop to do this is to buy from a "middleman" – in this case, wholesale merchants in Los Angeles who import large shipments from lots of places, and then sell small lots with lots of variety to small stores, like ours. The only problem with this is that it was not the game that we wanted to play. So, my wife and I decided to close the shop.

Well, my website reminds me of the Sonora Fashions experience. When people find out about the site, they are excited about it. They download lots of files, and they post links to it. They talk about it in discussion forums. Occasionally, they send me e-mails.

But they often ask, when are you going to write another piece? “Where’s the new stuff?”

The problem is that I don’t write new pieces very often. Sometimes months go by without any activity. And, it appeared, the slow rate of adding new material was a drawback to keeping the site in the public’s eye and increasing its exposure.

So, a few months ago, I decided to do things a little differently. Instead of investing most of my energy in writing a few longer articles, I would write lots of short ones. The result was this series of Miscellany pieces. Each of them contains a half-dozen or more notes or sketches on news items or books that I have read recently. Since my primary interest is planetary management, and trying to draw attention to the topic, I would often relate the book or news item to this subject.

My wife suggested that this was not a good idea. Her opinion was that the people that my site attracted were interested in planetary management and related topics (environment, energy, oil, politics), and that including items about other topics (e.g., current events) would simply dilute the website and defeat my purpose.

Several months have now passed since the first Miscellany piece, and I am about to make a decision about whether to continue the series. If you have a comment about whether I should continue or stop, please let me know, at <mailto:foundation@mega.bw> . Thanks!

Hubbert’s Peak

My site receives a fair number of hits from search engines to which people have entered the phrase, “Hubbert’s Peak” or “Hubbert’s Curve.” There are lots of books and articles on this topic. A good reference is the book, *Hubbert’s Peak: The Impending World Oil Shortage*, by Kenneth S. Deffeyes (Princeton University Press, 2001).

Jessica Williams

Last month I had to travel to Pretoria, South Africa, for an operation for a detached retina. On the airplane, I perused South Africa Airlines’ in-flight magazine, *Sawubona* (August 2004 issue). In the article entitled, “Wild Things,” it presented an interesting list, taken from a new book by Jessica Williams, entitled, *50 Facts that Should Change the World*. I have not read the book, but here is the list:

- More money is spent on subsidizing a cow for a single day in the European Union (50, or about eight US dollars) than most Africans live on in a month.
- A third of the world’s population is at war. In 2002, 30 countries were fighting in 37 armed conflicts – a combined population of over 2.29 billion people. A quarter of the conflicts in recent years have involved a struggle for natural resources (diamonds, columbine-tantalite for laptops and cellphones, rainforest timber).
- In 2003, the US spent \$680 billion on its military – 22 times the combined military spending of the so-called ‘rogue’ states – Cuba, Iraq, Iran, Libya, North Korea, Sudan and Syria.

- To fly a kiwi fruit from New Zealand to the UK means five times its weight in greenhouse gases are pumped into the atmosphere.
- In 2002, 81% of the world's state executions took place in three countries: China, Iran and the US.
- In China, as a result of the preference for sons over daughters and the country's one-child-per-family law, there are 44 million fewer women than men.
- People in industrialized countries eat between six and seven kilograms of food additives every year.
- More cheerfully, Brazil has more Avon ladies than members of its armed forces.
- According to the US Environmental Protection Agency, the air inside a typical American house is two to five times more polluted than the air outside – sometimes up to 100 times more contaminated – largely because of household cleaners and pesticides. Cancer rates are also rising in the US.
- About 60% of the contents of the average household black rubbish bag is recyclable – glass, paper, metals and plastic.
- A ton of recycled paper is the equivalent of 17 pine trees in paper production.
- Standby power – the power used when an appliance is turned off but not unplugged – could account for 10% of electrical power use in industrial countries by 2020, according to Worldwatch Institute.
- Recycling just one aluminum can saves enough energy to keep a laptop computer running for four hours.
- The research group Inform calculates that by 2005, consumers will have stockpiled over 500-million cellphones. When they end up in the landfill, they could release up to 142 tons of deadly lead into the environment.
- Each 100% organic cotton T-shirt you buy eliminates the use of 150 grams of agricultural chemicals.

A Country Filled with Spies

After terrorists destroyed the two airliners in Russia a few weeks ago, but before they initiated the Beslan school takeover, a friend of mine sent me an article from DEBKAFfile (August 25, 2004), entitled, "Putin's Sochi Residence Targeted by Hijacked Russian Plane." It discussed the dilemma faced by Putin in responding to the two-plane hijacking (both planes had sent hijack distress signals).

Commenting on the vulnerability of Russia to terrorists, it contained the following paragraph: "Whereas an unknown number of al Qaeda sleeper cells are known to have penetrated the United States and Canada, Russia is hemmed in on all sides by major al Qaeda networks, the largest based in the breakaway province of Chechnya. It is supported by Chechen and Muslim followers who live in many parts of Russia, providing an army of spies and terror operatives already in place." It now appears that Chechen terrorists were involved in all three incidents (the two plane bombings and the school takeover).

Russia is not alone in having an "army of spies and terror operatives already in place." Following the Immigration Act of 1965, the US embarked on a program to massively increase the number of people from a vast array of foreign cultures. When the Second World War began, the US had control of its relatively homogeneous population. In most parts of the country, people of foreign stock were not numerous. They stood out. It was an easy matter to round up all Japanese and place them in internment camps when World War II began.

Today, the US is not just as vulnerable as Russia, but far more vulnerable. It was an easy matter for foreign spies to hijack two planes and crash them into the World Trade Center. My wife and I recently vacationed in Russia, and were very impressed with the way that they monitored our presence. We were required to register with the authorities upon arrival at each hotel (by submitting our passports for overnight inspection by the government). Upon arrival, we were questioned about our motives for visiting Russia, and asked why our passport nationality (USA) differed from our trip origin (Zambia).

The Immigration Act of 1965 was the legacy of John F. Kennedy, who wrote the book, *A Nation of Immigrants*. It was sponsored and promoted by his brother, Edward Kennedy, capitalizing on sympathy for his brother's death. Now, after almost 40 years of mass immigration from all sorts of cultures, the US is highly vulnerable to destruction by terrorists. With its policies of free trade, porous borders and mass immigration from alien cultures, illegal immigrants no longer stand out. They dress like us and they now speak like us. They are free to move about and work in our country at will. It is no longer "our" country at all. The legacy of the Kennedy brothers is a country divided, a culture destroyed.

It is not too late for Russia to reduce its vulnerability to terrorism, by a significant repatriation effort. It is too late (politically impossible) for the US to do so.

President Putin has vowed to mobilize against terrorism. It will be interesting to see what happens next. On CNN a few nights ago I heard reference to the adoption of "personal profiling" by Russia, as a means of combating terrorism. The commentator noted that at the present time only Israel uses this means ('personal profiling') of improving the likelihood of finding and stopping terrorists.

Racial profiling is illegal in the United States (End Racial Profiling Act of 2001). According to the End Racial Profiling Act, racial profiling is defined as follows. "The term 'racial profiling' means the practice of a law enforcement agent relying, to any degree, on race, ethnicity, or national origin in selecting which individuals to subject to routine investigatory activities, or in deciding upon the scope and substance of law enforcement activity following the initial routine investigatory activity, except that racial profiling does not include reliance on such criteria in combination with other identifying factors when the law enforcement agent is seeking to apprehend a specific suspect whose race, ethnicity, or national origin is part of the description of the suspect."

Racial, ethnic and other personal profiling techniques are scientifically well founded as very effective ways of finding criminals (Bayes' Rule, search theory). If Russia is serious about fighting terrorism, it, as Israel, will certainly adopt profiling as one of its tools. The US is not serious about fighting terrorism, and, for the time being, will continue to eschew the use of this powerful tool. As global oil production peaks and terrorism increases, it, too, will (re)adopt the use of profiling. This technique works best in countries that are relatively homogeneous. If Russia and Israel continue to press for cultural homogeneity, profiling will become more and more effective. The US is now so swamped with foreign immigrants, however, that this tool is now much less effective than it was prior to 1965 (when the country was comprised of a dominant racial/ethnic/linguistic group).

Bush Suggests War on Terror Cannot Be Won

On Monday, August 30, President Bush suggested that the war on terrorism could not be won. In an interview on NBC-TV's "Today" show, he suggested that an all-out victory against

terrorism might not be possible. When asked whether the US could win the war on terror, he answered, "I don't think you can win it. But I think you can create conditions so that the – those who use terror as a tool are less acceptable in parts of the world." This remark drew immediate criticism from his election opponents, and he "clarified" his remarks a day later, stating that the US will certainly win the war against terrorism.

As I pointed out in an earlier note ("Some Notes on Strategy for Fighting Terrorism") the US is not serious about ending the war against terrorism. It is more profitable to allow it to continue at a low level, than to end it. From the US' point of view, "winning" the war on terrorism means waging it in such a way as to maximize economic activity and increase generation of wealth. The situation is reminiscent of the so-called Laffer curve used by economist Arthur Laffer to explain how the government might realize increased tax revenues by reducing the income tax rate. The curve is shaped like an igloo. At zero tax rate, the government realizes zero tax revenue. At 100% tax rate, the government also realizes zero revenue, because the economy is destroyed. Somewhere in between is a rate at which the government maximizes tax revenue. The problem, of course, is that the economy is so complex that it is very difficult to know what the optimal rate is, or whether you are below or above the optimal value (the peak, the maximum, the highest point on the curve).

The situation is similar with the war on terrorism. If the terrorists do nothing or if they are incredibly destructive, then the economic activity and wealth generation are less than if they continue to wage a low-level guerilla-style conflict. As a result, as long as they continue to operate at a low level, the US will not take effective steps to eliminate them (since that would be less profitable than letting them continue). For this reason, it is unlikely that terrorists will undertake very large attacks, such as nuclear-suitcase-bombing of hundreds of cities. If they did, then the US and the rest of the industrialized world would take whatever steps were necessary to destroy them (since the alternative is being destroyed, or, at least, a diminished economy).

A physicist friend of mine once commented on the Second Law of Thermodynamics as, "You can't win (get more energy out of a system than you put into it); you can't even break even (no perpetual motion machines; no process involving energy transformation is 100% efficient); and you can't even get out of the game (the universe is "winding down" to an eventual "heat death")."

At first glance, the war against terrorism seems a little like this. As George Bush observed, you can't win (in the traditional military sense). And, it seems, you can't get out of the game (since the conditions that have spawned the war on terrorism – industrial globalization – will grind inexorably on as long as world oil supplies last and industrialization / economic development continues). But there is, in fact, a very big difference. For the owners of the economy (the oligarchs of the industrial-world plutocracy), it is very profitable to continue waging the war. From an economic perspective, it is not practical to end it; it is, in fact, more profitable to invest in continuing the war on terrorism than in many other economic activities (i.e., building bombs and blowing them up generates more economic activity and wealth (for the oligarchs) than building TVs or refrigerators (for the common folk)). Hence, the war on terrorism will continue indefinitely (as long as the industrialized world continues).

The situation is a little complicated, and it is no wonder that President Bush misspoke. In the war against terrorism, there are several players (the oligarchs who control the economy, the workers in the industrial-world, the Islamists, and the third-world population, to name just a few), and each of them has different values and objectives (and resources). Bush recognized that the war would not be won in a traditional military sense. As long as it continues at a low level,

however, the oligarchs win big – that is why Bush could so easily say a day later that we would in fact certainly win it. The terrorists also win big, since they are each awarded 80 virgins on reaching heaven. About the only people who lose are the American consumers, who will be trading more and more TVs, cars, and refrigerators for security and surveillance systems, troops, tanks and ordnance. If someone would go to the trouble of analyzing the situation as a nonzero-sum game (preferably involving more than two players), the nature of what is going on would be a lot better understood.

Bertrand Russell and Neale Donald Walsch

In the 1950s, when I was in high school, I enjoyed reading the philosophy of Bertrand Russell. A few weeks ago, in a bookshop in the Johannesburg airport, I noticed a book of Russell's essays, *Why I Am Not a Christian and Other Essays on Religion and Related Subjects* (1957, Simon & Shuster / Touchstone). Remembering my enjoyment of reading Russell's work, I purchased the book and read it.

I enjoyed this very much. Someday, I will summarize some of Russell's observations from the book. For today, however, I will simply note a paragraph from the chapter, "What I Believe," which was originally published as a small book in 1925. The paragraph is of interest because the views presented therein are essentially those of Neale Donald Walsch in his *Conversations with God* series, viz., moral relativism. Russell is writing about the "good life," which he defines as follows: "The good life is one inspired by love and guided by knowledge." He defines love as follows: "Love at its fullest is an indissoluble combination of the two elements, delight and well-wishing." With respect to knowledge, Russell writes, "When I speak of knowledge as an ingredient of the good life, I am not thinking of ethical knowledge but of scientific knowledge and knowledge of particular facts. I do not think there is, strictly speaking, such a thing as ethical knowledge. If we desire to achieve some end, knowledge may show us the means, and this knowledge may loosely pass as ethical. But I do not believe that we can decide what sort of conduct is right or wrong except by reference to its probably consequences. Given an end to be achieved, it is a question for science to discover how to achieve it. All moral rules must be tested by examining whether they tend to realize ends that we desire. I say ends that we desire, not ends that we *ought* to desire. What we 'ought' to desire is merely what someone else wishes us to desire. Usually it is what the authorities wish us to desire – parents, schoolmasters, policemen, and judges. ...When I say that the morality of conduct is to be judged by its probably consequences, I mean that I desire to see approval given to behavior likely to realize social purposes which we desire, and disapproval to opposite behavior. At present this is not done; there are certain traditional rules according to which approval and disapproval are meted out quite regardless of consequences."

The Way of the Warrior

There is a strong "warrior tradition" in certain philosophical and mystical traditions. Writing in *The Teachings of Don Carlos: Practical Applications of the Works of Carlos Castaneda*, Victor Sanchez writes the following, in a section entitled, "The Way of the Warrior: The Only Aid on the Voyage into the Unknown."

"Don Juan said in Castaneda's first book that a man goes to knowledge the same way he goes to war: with fear, respect, wakefulness, and with absolute confidence. Therefore, those who go to knowledge could very well be called warriors. The correct way to walk this path is in the manner of a warrior. In *Tales of Power*, the Yaqui sorcerer reveals that to live like a warrior 'is the glue that glues together all the parts' of individual knowledge.

“The spirit of a warrior is one of the central themes found throughout the work of Castaneda, and it constitutes the fundamental attitude required for the demands made by the path of knowledge. Don Juan tells Carlos that only as a warrior can a person survive in the sorcerer’s world, although it is not necessary to be a sorcerer in order to be a warrior. The possibility is not easy, but it is open to anyone.

“The way of the warrior of which Castaneda speaks has little or nothing to do with human wars such as we know them, principally because it has nothing to do with violence or the intent to destroy anything or anyone. Far from it, in fact. This is perhaps difficult to understand in a culture such as ours where the word ‘war’ signifies one of the most frequent activities of ‘civilized’ societies, whether it be on an individual or social level, and where it always refers to the intent to impose our will on others through subtle or outright violence.”

In *Shambhala: The Sacred Path of the Warrior*, Chögyam Trungpa writes: “...this volume draws on ancient, perhaps even primordial, wisdom and principles of human conduct, as manifested in the traditional, pre-industrial societies of Tibet, India, China, Japan, and Korea. In particular, this book draws its imagery and inspiration from the warrior culture of Tibet, which predated Buddhism and remained a basic influence on Tibetan society until the Communist Chinese invasion in 1959. ...Warriorship here does not refer to making war on others. Aggression is the source of our problems, not the solution. Here the word ‘warrior’ is taken from the Tibetan *pawo*, which literally means ‘one who is brave.’ Warriorship in this context is the tradition of all human bravery, or the tradition of fearlessness. The North American Indians had such a tradition, and it also existed in South American Indian societies. The Japanese ideal of the samurai also represented a warrior tradition of wisdom, and there have been principles of enlightened warriorship in Western Christian societies as well. King Arthur is a legendary example of warriorship in the Western tradition, and great rulers in the Bible, such as King David, are examples of warriors common to both the Jewish and Christian traditions. On our planet earth there have been many fine examples of warriorship.”

Culture Change

I am 62 years old. The difference between society when I was a kid and now is really striking. I was born in Canada and raised (from age 10) in the US. As a boy, security was a non-issue. My sister and I walked a mile or so to and from school every day, without supervision. We never locked the house unless we were going out of town. Some cars did not even use ignition keys. A man of average means could expect to own a house and a car, and have his wife stay at home with the children. “No-loitering” signs were posted in many places. It was not allowed simply to “stand around” on the street or other public place.

The other day, I remembered an incident from my childhood that exemplifies the difference in culture between now and then. I must have been about six or seven, and was walking home from school, alone (in Kingston, Ontario – one of Ontario’s larger cities (at one time the capital of Canada) – on the main street headed north through town). I was on the sidewalk, passing a lot of “row houses.” Each house had a front porch on which people would sit and watch passers-by. The porches were perhaps ten or fifteen feet from the sidewalk.

On this particular day I was taking my time, walking slowly, not paying attention to anything in particular. At one point I was walking past a house where an old lady was sitting on a rocking chair on the porch. As I was walking along, I was dragging my shoes slightly on the sidewalk. This waste of sole really bothered the old lady, who called out to me, “Don’t drag those shoes on the sidewalk! Don’t you know your parents will have to replace those worn-out soles!”

Well, I was certainly surprised by her remark, and duly chastised. At that age, my reaction was not at all defensive. I had not thought at all about the wear that my foot-dragging was causing, and thought only of the good point that she was making. I acknowledged her remarks, picked up my feet, and went on my way. I don't believe that I have ever dragged my feet since that day.

There are several interesting points here that reflect cultural differences between then and now. First, a six- or seven-year old would not be walking home alone in a city the size of Kingston, in Canada or the US. Second, if an old lady criticized a six- or seven-year-old today, he would probably tell her to mind her own business. Third, he would probably keep on dragging his feet, just to spite her. Fourth, the old lady would probably never have reprimanded him in the first place, mindful that he might sass her back. How things change.

What's in a Name?

The first really big antivirus system was developed by McAfee Corporation. After some years, McAfee was taken over by Network Associates, and the "McAfee" brand was almost everywhere replaced by "Network Associates." At the time, I was rather amazed why a firm (Network Associates) would acquire such a well-known brand name (McAfee) and then proceed to suppress it. When Nationsbank (of Charlotte, NC) took over Bank of America, it changed its name to Bank of America, since that firm had better name recognition. When First Union Bank (also in Charlotte) took over Wachovia Bank, it changed its name to Wachovia, since that bank had a fine reputation for quality. Firms usually try to make the most out of a merger or takeover, and generally adopt the name that has the most "goodwill" or reputation or market share.

So why did Network Associates not do this, I always wondered. Well, a few weeks ago I noticed that Network Associates was now proceeding to adopt the name McAfee. Makes sense. A rose by any other name may smell just as sweet, but if few people know it is still a rose, you lose a lot.