

Danville News Column
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“Valuing Indebtedness”
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There’s good debt and bad debt. Good debt is affordable debt that gives me a chance to live better than what my immediate cash flow allows. Good debt allows me to enjoy my house, send my kids to college. Bad debt enslaves, ensnares, enrages, like the chronic crushing captivity of credit cards, especially for those lacking cushion of family, funds banked, or the likelihood of wages increasing.

We didn’t get here overnight.

We’re paying today a bill due after decades of wanting what we want and wanting it right now, not to mention bad wars, exploitative market-trading, and skewed accounting where one Ohio State season ticket price is \$170 to fund a \$2.5 million dollar salary of a football coach. \$170 for five games, student price. Lord, he’s only a coach and it’s only a game.

Woody’s Guthrie’s abusive ‘Big Money Boys’ are our nation’s real debt burden. That’s where you find the real sense of entitlement.

If it weren’t for WIC, food stamps, unemployment insurance, foreclosure mediation, social security, medicare, medicaid, we’d be worse off than the bread lines, Hoovervilles, migrations, and farm confiscation of the Great Depression. From 2000 to 2009, child poverty increased by 2.5 million children. 20% of our children live in poverty.

Most folk just want to work and take care of theirs. Unions began to protect the right to work. After all, Woody Guthrie sang, the bosses had their own kind of Union – Stock Exchange, Country Clubs, Government – why not the working stiff?

We suffer bad debt because we violated what Frederick Douglass advocated as national moral principles. According to Douglass, "the principles of honor, integrity and affection" are the essential prerequisite for enduring success: *“All human experience proves over and over again, that any success which comes through meanness, trickery, fraud and dishonour, is but emptiness and will only be a torment to its possessor.”*

So why is Standard and Poor’s still given so much authority? Isn’t this supposed to be the United States of America, not United States Inc.?

Déjà vu with humorist Will Rogers: *“The money was all appropriated for the top in the hopes that it would trickle down to the needy. Mr. Hoover didn’t know that money trickled up. Give it to the people at the bottom and the people at the top will have it before night, anyhow. But it will at least have passed through the poor fellow’s hands.”*

Why do bankers control national policy? Why not preachers, poets, plumbers, folk musicians, historians?

Yet, perhaps, this mess reveals something useful: the failure of a materialistic, economic view of life; the failure of a life driven by power and pleasure, gain and greed; the failure of a life valued by what's in your pocket rather than your heart; the failure of a life whose first question asks, "What's in it for me?"

As much as I'd love to pay off my loans and get out of debt, I cherish my indebtedness. I'm deeply indebted to those who invested in me. None is a self-made man. We all stand on the shoulders of others. We all owe others. We all live lives interdependent, like pick-up sticks. Move one, all are affected. The wealthy will not long remain wealthy if the poor long remain the poor.

I'll blame myself for my personal failures, but I am who I am because of how I have chosen to respond to the contributions of others: wife, teachers, parents, friends, mentors, angels unawares, my children.

Get beyond the exasperating headlines and finger-pointing talking points. Get beyond the vapid speeches and insipid slogans.

Ponder the positives surrounding. These could be our finest days.

I remain confident that our children's children will see the second Renaissance. The terror of constant war, the grim veneration of death, and the plagues that ravaged the 13th century, gave birth to the Western Renaissance of the 14th. So too, I remain steadfastly convinced, these long dark days which have driven us to our knees will raise us to a new age of light and fresh awakening, an age of a bright shining humanity.

Cherish, embrace, celebrate your indebtedness. Your spiritual indebtedness. These times, with stress and humiliation, teach us to value the inner-life rather than the externals, to value our connectedness, to come to terms with limits, casting off fear as the place from which we make our decisions.

I am blessed beyond all measure. My identity, my worth depends not on anything the government or Big Money Boys say.