

The Family Cloth

by G. Murphy Donovan (April 2014)

*"Our mothers all are junkies. Our fathers all are drunks.
Golly Moses, natcherly we're punks!" – Stephen Sondheim*

Not long ago, a public museum in the nation's capital was renovated and a fountain added to the landscaping. A month or two later the fountain moat was covered with a flotsam of disposable diapers and a garnish of sanitary napkins. If a proper survey had been done, the stew probably contained a sprinkling of used condoms too.

Soon the moat was drained and bricked over like an abandoned privy. The fountain was sacrificed for one of two reasons: public health concerns – or municipal contracts that didn't cover diaper harvesting, sanitary napkin noodling, or rubber recycling.

Public works are often funded with expectations that have little to do with likely public uses. And excuses for abuses are often even more fantastic than naïve expectations. Indeed, excuse making is a cultural staple nowadays. Call it social [iatrogenesis](#).

All science begins with categorization and to that end we should begin to capture the most common excuses used to justify bad behavior.

Poverty

Poor is not necessarily unfortunate. Indeed, American poverty is a gateway for all manner of public largess: welfare, housing, food stamps, day care, education, electronics, and now [four squares](#) at any local custodial. Never mind that [few](#) children will eat at a public school cafeteria on a bet. Waste and indulgence are constant companions. Poverty doesn't mean denial either. Most of America's social service clients cover a spread from plump to obese. More is never enough.

Poverty is not a sometime thing. As many as one in three Americans are alleged to be permanent "statistical" paupers in the richest nation on earth. Never mind that the "poor" demographic has automobiles, alcohol, body art, recreational drugs, piercings, televisions, cell phones, laptops, health care, hair care, and air conditioning. On the dole, or disabled, is now a career choice, a [generational](#) ambition. With enough "safety net," independence or employment

might be superfluous. Poverty, a condition that used to provide the energy of ambition, might now be the mother of all excuses.

Ignorance

Ignorance is cousin to poverty and an even closer relative to formal education. Alas, American public schools today are more about custody and credentials and less about skills – or literacy in too many cases. There is, however, a link between high school diplomas, sheepskins, and unemployment; a correlation between meaningless credentials and knowledge vacuums. Education used to be opportunity before performance was [kicked](#) to the curb.

Insensitive captains of industry, however, value knowledge or skills more than meaningless certificates. Who would think that 16 years of “education” would produce semi-literate dullards that no one wants to hire? Teachers are drawn from the [bottom](#) of the achievement barrel; the products of public schools are consistent with that standard. “Dropout” might be an enlightened choice in a system with inedible lunch and no entrance or exit standards – for faculty or student.

You could rationalize public schools as the custodians of extended childhood – or a jobs program for academic underachievers. Ignorance might not be an excuse before the law, but it does explain a lot of dependencies.

Race

Race is the best excuse for simple minds. The black/white reduction is a refuge for masochists and self-hate. Skin color is not binary. Indeed, the biological skin-tone [spectrum](#) ranges from brown to pink.

Black or white is a cynical political, not a physical, construct. John Boehner has a better tan than Barack Obama. Nonetheless, folks who use expressions like “people of color” are likely to see fair skin as a social asset and dark skin as an excuse for a handout; a universe where [dependency](#) is generational bondage; indeed, another plantation.

Binary skin typing is coupled to the soft racism of low expectations. Eumelanin minorities expect males to be baby daddies, not husbands or fathers. “Brothers” are expected to do some time in the joint too. “Street credibility” or prison time are kinds of [social currency](#). The dark side of the skin spectrum also regards chumps as they do tattoos, just another indelible lifestyle.

The victim trope is reinforced by Media pandering. Commentators, like Chris Mathews, and

networks like NBC, regularly dismiss criticism of any incompetent minority politician as racism. Indeed, [patronization](#) is now an acceptable form of bigotry.

Even Harvard graduates affirm the pernicious refractions of color. Barack Obama defines himself as black when such an assertion can never be more than half true. The binary racial divide is a useful lie – and another excuse. Obama is living proof that education, maturity, and judgment are not synonymous.

Illness

If race is the sorriest of justifications, mental illness is surely the most popular. Here the excuse vendors get a turbo-charge from science – the *Diagnostic and Statistical [Manual of Mental Disorders](#)* (DSM). The recently revised DSM suggests that [half](#) of all Americans will be victim of some diagnosable mental disorder in a lifetime. Note such maladies are Internet User Disorder (IUD) and Genito-Pelvic Pain/Penetration Disorder (GPPD). Yes, that first acronym is IUD! Presumably, GPPD is a case where a large penis is obstructed by some smaller unlubricated orifice.

Psychiatry and psychology are sciences in the same sense that divining and astrology are sciences. If the DSM provides any clues, the extravagant catalogue of mental disease is more about revenue than remedy. Nonetheless, if you're a drunk, junkie, punk, or just a selfish jerk; a DSM diagnosis comes in handy in the court of public [opinion](#).

Through such justifications Philip Seymour Hoffman will be celebrated in death and Woody Allen will continue to live large.

The Environment

When the subject is twaddle, environmentalists take the cake. Move over Big Gulp, snail darter, or the plastic versus paper imbroglios. The "[family cloth](#)" movement has arrived. A "reusable" cloth is now offered as a "green" alternative to toilet paper. Never mind that the wood pulp used to make azimuth wipes is a renewable resource. And how is disposable toilet paper any more objectionable in toilets than disposable diapers and sanitary napkins are in public fountains?



Gross domestic artifacts get a pass today because disposable diapers and nappies are thought to be settled feminist law. The same crowd that labored to strike expressions like "on the rag" from public discourse are now arguing for reusable wipes?

At the macro level, the logic of environmental whining is just as bizarre. Eugene Robinson of the *Washington Post* now [argues](#) that hot and cold weather supports the argument for climate change (nee global warming). When evidence is selective or arbitrary, scientific truth is predictably ambiguous.

Capitalism

The emotions that drive the blame game reach a kind of nihilistic apogee when the subject is wealth. Capitalism, like toilet paper, is in the crosshairs. Here a binary metaphor might actually be useful; a world of pie [makers](#) and pie eaters.

Think of pie makers as stock brokers, bankers, farmers, industrialists, retailers, or kids with garage factories or lemonade stands; people like Carnegie, Ford, Wright, Rockefeller, Rothschild, Gates, Jobs, or Buffett. Yes, they control most of the world's wealth. After all, they are pie makers. Entrepreneurs also provide the lion's share of philanthropy for pie eaters.

Alas, pie munchers outnumber pie bakers by a wide margin. And the eaters are manipulated now by community organizers, the apostles of redistribution. Indeed, dependents are approaching a permanent majority. If Americans at the public education trough are counted, pie eaters are a veto-proof majority. For a more complete understanding of pie slicers, pie consumers, and associated civic righteousness; see [rent seeking](#), socialism, or communism.

Excuse makers claim that the rich exploit the poor, when in fact that ship sailed 60 years ago. Pie eaters are, or will be, a majority in most democracies. And social democrats vote themselves more pie every year. Thus we see the entrepreneurial class shrinking and the dependent class [exploding](#). If such absurd political/fiscal paradigms are allowed to reach their inevitable arithmetic climax, wealth creation, baked goods included, become so much pie in the sky.

Global Excuses

Since 1978, imprudent, gratuitous absolutions now invest foreign policy too. Failure in undeveloped (nee Third World) nations is regularly attributed to [Orientalism](#), an excuse where dysfunction, especially in the Muslim or Arab worlds, is attributed to European imperialism, colonialism, chauvinism or any other alleged "exploitation." Here again, putative victims are patronized. Whole populations, their religions, and associated polities are painted as victims of nefarious external influences. Ironically, domestic victimology celebrates government as the solution, while the global meme portrays government, especially western democracies, as

the problem.

The effects of excuses, local or global, are inexorably iatrogenic. Since the Kennedy assassination, the American Left has wholesaled too many promises that cannot possibly be kept – and retailed one too many excuses for failures.

The New Counterculture

The “more is never enough” (MINE) lobby, a coalition that rallies around ephemeral goals like “justice” and “fairness,” is composed of entitlement shills, soft racists, social apologists, and global appeasers. They are united by excuse making. Domestically, the argument is; “what’s mine is mine and what’s yours is mine too.” Abroad, the argument might read: “Europe, America, and the rest of the developed (nee first or successful) world are responsible for whatever ails the rest.” Success fed on the weak, so the mantra goes, and now the weak are entitled to feed on redress – permanently.

The arguments of the modern Left and academia are also [burdened](#) by anti-Judaism. Where other excuses fail, Jews often become all-purpose scapegoats.

Social democracy, a triumph of the Left, has been the conventional wisdom since the 60s. Now it’s just a target-rich environment. The old radicals are selling out (See Bill Ayers), burning out (see Angela Davis), or bombing out (see Barack Obama). A culture of pie eaters did not arise without pushback however. Indeed, two generations of political correctness have spawned a 21st-century counterculture.

Contrarians now speak for a more pragmatic worldview where restraint and responsibility challenge the nanny state and the global village. New radicals include the likes of Dinesh D’Souza, Thomas Sowell, Conrad Black, Walter E. Williams, Daniel Pipes, Rupert Murdoch, Caroline Glick, Theodore Dalrymple, the Koch brothers, and media stars like Rush Limbaugh, among others.

Limbaugh is the *bete noire* of excuse makers. In another day he might have been just another political humorist like Mark Twain or George Carlin, but today’s Left does not suffer ridicule gladly. Humor is not the long pole in the liberal tent even on a good day. By taking Limbaugh too seriously, progressives make *El Rushbo* possible. If audience is a measure of success; Limbaugh has 30 million “likes” – five days a week. No combination of networks has that kind of reach.



Limbaugh is empowered by a disingenuous Left. The more liberals posture and whine, the bigger Rush becomes. Take Charles Schumer (D) of New York, typical urban shill. Schumer [blames](#) Rush Limbaugh for White House policy failures. Recall that Schumer swims in the same water that spawned the Cuomo tribe, Michael Bloomberg, Eliot Spitzer, Anthony Weiner; and now the Clintons – the latter for a third run at those Oval Office interns.

Candor is not something anyone expects from the old Left, but the truth about big city touts like Charles Schumer is that he and his fellow Democrats make Rush and company possible. Commentators like Limbaugh have been chipping away “pie-in-the-sky” socialism and the flakes are starting to fall. With any luck, humor and common sense will get the country off the family cloth too – and back on the road to restraint, responsibility, and success.

G. Murphy Donovan writes about the politics of national security.

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