

American Paralysis and Decline



by Victor Davis Hanson

“We can bear neither our diseases nor their remedies.”

So shrugged the ancient historian Livy (59 B.C.–17 A.D.) of the long decline of Roman national character that, in his age, finally ended the Roman Republic.

Like a patient whose medicine proves worse than the disease, Livy lamented that the Romans knew that they had become corrupt and lawless.

But the very contemplation of the hard medicine needed for restoration—and the furious reaction that would meet the remedy—made it impossible to save the patient.

America is nearing such an impasse.

We know that no state can long exist after opening its borders to over 7 million illegal aliens, requiring neither background

checks nor legality.

The recent murder of a Georgia female jogger by an illegal alien and the savage beating of New York policemen by similar others hardly merit media attention.

Everyone knows that neither new appropriations nor new laws are needed to secure the border as it was in 2020.

Instead, we could just stop suicidal catch-and-release, deport lawbreakers, privilege the legal over the illegal immigrant, demand would-be refugees apply for asylum first in their native countries, finish the border wall, and pressure Mexico to stop undermining the territorial integrity of its northern neighbor.

But then we shrug, “We can’t do that”—paralyzed in fear of being smeared as “xenophobic,” “nativist,” or “racist.”

So this generation apparently feels that it can endure the collateral damage of daily assaults on American citizens, the near bankruptcy of our cities, and 100,000 fentanyl deaths per year—but certainly not the idea that it is somehow not politically correct or compassionate.

The same is true of the \$35 trillion debt, now costing more than \$1 trillion a year in interest payments—and growing. We all know it is unsustainable. Americans understand it will eventually lead either to destructive hyperinflation, suicidal renunciation of federal debt, or confiscation of private savings.

Yet we ignore the reckless spending and keep borrowing well over \$1 trillion a year. Apparently, our generation prefers being praised as “virtuous” and “caring.” So it leaves the next generation to be smeared as “cruel” and “unfair” when it is forced to cut federal entitlements and bloated government or face civilizational collapse.

The crime epidemic is also similar. Everyone accepts that no society can long endure quasi-legalized shoplifting or green-lighting smash-and-grabbers and carjackers to be released without bail.

But we assume that such a civilizational implosion will never reach our own sanctuary neighborhoods or safe places of work—at least not yet.

We also know that restoring deterrence by arresting, convicting, and jailing repeat felons will return safety to our streets.

But again, we fear even more that advocating “law and order” will earn slanders like “racist” or “reactionary.”

Ditto the homeless. In an age of self-congratulation and hyper-environmentalism, we know that a million homeless defecating, urinating, injecting, and assaulting on our downtown sidewalks and storefronts is medieval.

We know that it is illegal to camp out on the street and publicly harass citizens or relieve oneself in public.

And we know the cure lies in building and staffing more mental institutions and providing areas far from public spaces where the homeless can find shelter, sanitation, and medical care.

But the very idea of removing anyone from his accustomed sidewalk spot, or the notion of the use of force to transport the mentally ill to proper and humane facilities, terrifies us.

So we walk around, step over, and ignore those on the street.

Is the assumption that the odds of being assaulted or sickened acceptable? Or do we just not wish to learn where the flotsam, jetsam, and human offal of the street end up?

Most accept that had former President Donald Trump just not

run for president in 2024 or was a man of the left, he would not now be facing four different felony court cases.

Most accept that three of the four prosecutors have either in advance promised to get Mr. Trump or have proved grossly unethical.

Most know it is wrong to try to remove a leading presidential candidate from state ballots.

Yet many shrug that this new weaponization of America's legal system is the flamboyant Trump's own problem, not their own. So they ignore the third worldization of our political system, which they quietly acknowledge is otherwise leading us to a Venezuela-like mess.

The paralysis of American society extends to our foreign policy as well. We deplore the terrorism of Iran and its thuggish surrogates. But we fear more the nasty, costly business of stopping its aggression.

Societies do not always collapse from a lack of wealth, invasion, or natural catastrophes.

Most often, they know what is destroying them. But they are so paralyzed by their fear that the road to salvation becomes too painful to even contemplate.

So they implode gradually, then suddenly.

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