

Shunning

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by Paul Harris

The 'shunning' of an individual is the act of deliberately avoiding association with him or her. The historical punishments of ostracism and exile were forms of shunning. Today, shunning in an official, formalized manner is practiced by only a few religions, although it continues to be practiced informally in every sort of human grouping or gathering.

Shunning aims to protect a group from members who have committed acts seen as harmful to the shunning organization, or who violate the group's norms.

For some religious groups, shunning might be seen as the ultimate act of rejection by disconnecting an individual from the group. Historically, the practice is sure to have been initiated for spurious reasons from time to time – but as a social agent to ensure civil behaviour, it is a powerful tool. It serves a function similar to the amputation of a right hand in Islam.

In modern times, occasions arise when one or several countries choose to 'shun' another nation as a way of trying to influence a change in that nation's behaviour. Think of the United States' embargo on Cuba, sanctions levied against bad actors by the United Nations (like Libya, Iraq), Canadian sanctions against South Africa, eventually adopted by most of the British Commonwealth. That last example is a model of what can be accomplished with international condemnation; although the world's sanctions against Apartheid cannot claim full credit for the turnaround in South Africa, it was a powerful incentive to those who sought to bring about changes there.

This is an article about the United States of America. From the outset, let me state clearly that there is tremendous credit due to the US for a wide variety of social, humanitarian, artistic, scientific, intellectual accomplishments. But this small group of people, ruled by an even smaller group of thugs (a kleptocracy), is truly the epitome of the 'tail-wagging-the-dog' syndrome. The US comprises a small fraction of the world but it sees all the rest of the world – and, for emphasis, ALL the rest of the world – as its servant, its supplier of cheap goods and labour, its warehouse, its flea market, the place to play with its guns.

Both Canada and Mexico can reasonably think of the United States as our best friend. But it is also our worst enemy. Indeed, I will argue here that the United States is the enemy of ALL nations. It may be a little tougher for Canada and Mexico because the Beast lives next door, but also a little easier because at

least they haven't sent in the troops. Yet.

Now, we've all heard the rebuttal that 'not all Americans are like that', and that is certainly true. The US has at least as many decent humans as any other nation, more than many. But a country premised on 'we the people ...' cannot shirk the responsibility for what they do as a group. The actions of the US are the actions of the whole population, by definition ... the US constitution does not open with 'we, some of the people'.

Many outside the US have waited patiently for them to outgrow their juvenile delinquency, but they show no sign of maturing. We have waited patiently for the good citizens of the US to corral the bad, but they persist in failing to do so. And now that they are acting out again and threatening the peace and security of the entire planet, it is high time that the rest of us took matters into our own hands.

The rest of the world should join hands and shun the United States.

America, the country, really does believe it is better than anyone else. That America is entitled to as much of the resources and riches of the planet as it wants and it doesn't matter whomever else might have to suffer or go short. That all other nations are enemies if they don't march to the American drum in virtually any arena you might mention. That it has the right, indeed the obligation, to enforce its will wherever it sees fit, and by whatever means it wants. That it has the right to invade sovereign nations as a way of deflecting attention from domestic political scandals or if there is some new weapon that needs a good field testing. That killing of foreign civilians doesn't really count because they're always in season and there's no quota. That a bullet-ridden and trigger-happy American society is in every way superior to any other place on earth.

Astonishingly, Americans as a group have a hard time grasping that other folks might be a little annoyed about all that.

Bombs and Bullets

Consider their military adventures. The United States claims to be a nation of peace lovers and officially it has been at peace since the end of the Second World War. Except, that is, for their attacks on:

- China (1945-46)
- Korea (1950-53)
- Guatemala (1954, 1967-69)
- Cuba (1959-60)
- Belgian Congo (1964)
- Vietnam (1961-73)
- Cambodia (1969-70)
- Grenada (1983)
- Libya (1986)
- El Salvador (1980-92)

- Nicaragua (1981-90)
- Panama (1989)
- Iraq (1991)
- Somalia (1993)
- Bosnia (1995)
- Sudan (1998)
- Yugoslavia (1999)
- Afghanistan (2001-02)
- plus a grudge match currently underway in Iraq (since 2003)
- Plus "police action" in Colombia re: drugs (ongoing), an insurrection in Chile (1973) and numerous other covert bombings conducted by, or under the direction of, the CIA.

From 1945 to the early years of the 21st century, the US attempted to overthrow more than 40 foreign governments and to crush more than 30 populist movements fighting against insufferable regimes. In the process, they bombed about 25 countries, killed several million people, and condemned many millions more to lives of agony, poverty and despair. Oh yes, and they're presently sabre-rattling against Iran and, maybe, North Korea. [Forgive me if I've forgotten any military excursion here; it's hard to keep track. And I do concede that Korea and Iraq (1991) were different because they occurred under the aegis of the United Nations; but my that does not deflect from my point that this a bellicose group.]

Most of this activity took place during a time when the United States was allegedly in a defensive posture. In reality, the United States has never been in a defensive posture. It's short history has been one of expansionism; first through movement to the west coast, then economically in the rest of the Americas where profits can be derived without the overhead of actually running the countries.

At this point, thanks to George W. Bush's September 2002 document entitled 'The National Security Strategy of the United States of America' (NSS), we know with certainty that the United States intends to rule the world. They will act unilaterally to attack wherever and whenever they wish and they have already demonstrated that they mean it. Given their propensity for field-testing their high-tech weaponry, should they really be surprised that most other nations fear them? And is it rational for them to think that those who fear them are going to like them?

But it isn't quite as simple as worrying about American bombs because they don't drop them everywhere. There are actually some places that the US considers to be alright. Canada for one, although they often think we are cheeky buggers who they're one day going to have to squash. Britain for another, although one wonders if the US only thinks well of them because of the recent lapses of British common sense in supporting Bush's military adventures.

Let's Make a Deal

Ask any country that's ever entered into a trade agreement with the United States how well it worked out for them. The US bargains with a fisted glove, despite George Bush's remarks in the second paragraph of the NSS: "In keeping with our heritage and principles, we do not use our strength to press

for unilateral advantage.” He couldn’t even get past the second paragraph without lying.

The fact is, the financial instruments that operate the world – the World Trade Organization, the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund – are all tools of American diplomacy (I use that term loosely since diplomacy is not a strong suit for America and never has been). Oil, that most precious commodity, the thing that seems to attract American military excursions like flies to a corpse, is priced in US dollars giving the United States an unprecedented trading advantage over every other nation. The Yankee buck is used as the currency standard in most parts of the world despite its shaky foundations and the tremulous state of the American economy. By default, then, the currencies of the rest of the world are subservient and unstable because of their measurement against the flaky dollar.

The list of agreements entered into by the US that they have ignored, abrogated, or violated is long; and it has grown exponentially in recent years. Without even looking beyond the borders of North America, the US record of honouring its commitments is appalling. The Free Trade Agreement (FTA), the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) have been sad examples of the way the US bullies its ‘partners’. It routinely ignores rulings of the dispute resolution panels that it doesn’t like, it slaps unjustified tariffs against its partners and dares them to do something about it. It fully expects the other partners to live with and adhere to the agreed upon rules, but it has no intention of doing so itself.

Naturally, these examples should serve as warnings to anyone else foolish enough to think they can enter into equal agreements with the US. It should be clear to all that no trade agreement with the United States is ever predicated on a ‘win-win’ principle, but on the premise that all the chips end up on the American side of the ledger. It is almost pathological that the US cannot abide the idea of both sides winning something, because that means something was left on the table that they could have grabbed.

On the horizon is the Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA) and the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA). Despite the obvious failings of FTA and NAFTA, other North and South American countries have given serious consideration to entering into trade agreements with the United States. Some have already foolishly signed on the dotted line. They need only look at the record of the way America adheres to its bargains with its closest neighbours to realize that the United States considers the rest of the world to be nothing more than its supplier of cheap raw materials and labour, and the place that it wishes to dump its surplus and its junk.

Playing well with others

One of the most sensible things ever created by the countries of the world is the United Nations. Its problems and weaknesses are huge, but most stem from four things: the foolish concept of the Security Council; the American belief that the sole function of the UN is to service the domestic and foreign interests of the United States; the failure of the US to live up to its commitments to the UN; and the US determination that nothing the rest of the member nations want or think is relevant if it doesn’t suit the United States.

If the US was being given a grade school report card for its United Nations activities it would be given

the lowest grade possible and the teacher would surely note that the US does not play well with its peers. Indeed, the United States does not seriously consider that it *has* peers. There is a good chance the teacher might think the US needs professional intervention to deal with its obvious psychopathic tendencies.

Recently on the table was a draft agreement for United Nations reform and renewal. It is well-recognized internationally that the UN has shortcomings and members from many nations worked long and hard to prepare a draft proposal for addressing those weaknesses. At the eleventh hour, the United States made hundreds of changes to the document that they insisted would be necessary before they would agree to the rest. The parts they were willing to leave in place are the vague ‘lets play nice’ homilies that are unenforceable and make no commitments; the parts they want changed or removed provide a solid roadmap to showcase the disagreements the US has with the rest of the world on almost every imaginable global issue. In the end, a document barely worth the price of the paper on which it was printed was the result. No reform or improvement of the UN will come out of this massive effort to address its shortcomings. It is no wonder Venezuelan president Hugo Chávez Frias called for the UN to be moved out of the United States.

Think back again to President Bush’s statement: “In keeping with our heritage and principles, we do not use our strength to press for unilateral advantage.” It is difficult to credit that there is anyone, anywhere, including within the United States, who could make that statement with a straight face. Where the US is unable to win agreement from other countries, it threatens. It starts with gentle remonstrance but the stakes very quickly rise to trade and even military threats: it takes guts to stand up to the US and only a few countries have the clout or temerity to do so (China and Cuba, respectively, come easily to mind).

But the reason these difficulties arise in the first place is there is no room in the eyes of the United States for compromise. President Bush again: “Either you’re with us, or you’re with the terrorists.” This narrow black-versus-white approach (an appropriate metaphor for the US) allows for no compromise, it permits no neutrality. It is the classic schoolyard bully approach to problem solving.

As a further example, consider the American attitude to such concepts as the International Court of Justice. The US refuses to be a part of it because they will not put themselves in the position where someone else has the power to judge them or the activities of their citizens. They believe that international law governs everyone but them: they were quite prepared to judge the Third Reich at Nuremburg and Manuel Noriega (after he finished being useful to them) and Saddam Hussein, and so on, but they refuse to accept that anyone, anywhere, has the right to judge them or one of their citizens.

Freedom

The United States prides itself on being free. Its citizens have come to believe that this includes them although any outsider can easily see that the only freedom in the US is the freedom of the elite to get richer and richer. The US operates on the principle of ‘free enterprise for the poor and socialism for the rich’ in an astounding display of law-of-the-jungle mentality. The rich and the elite of the US enjoy the biggest and best of everything while the lower castes fend for themselves.

This is a nation with wealth and privilege beyond measure, yet it houses vast numbers of poor and downtrodden who are left to wallow on their own. A timely example is in front of the world as we all watch with horror and consternation the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. It is clear that the US was unprepared for this disaster despite having all the resources imaginable, despite having plenty of notice that this event was about to occur, despite having years of warning that it would occur some day. It is not lost on anyone that the slow and feeble response of the Bush administration to this catastrophe is coloured by who the victims happen to be.

The US was founded on the principle of democracy, the republican form of democracy, but it has been many years since it practiced democracy or even believed that it should. We all know its elections are unfair contests of rich against rich, often with unscrupulous polling practices to ensure the right person wins. And we all know that once elected, the winners are ensconced for the sole purpose of lining their own pockets and those of their backers.

Yet the United States strides around the world with the alleged aim of installing 'democracy', by force if necessary, even if the people affected would rather not have it. There is a proselytizing fervour and a missionary zeal with which the US pledges to 'free' the rest of the world. It cannot be stated more clearly that the US interest in other nations is solely as providers of cheap raw materials and labour, and as market places. They are quite content to accept the rule of dictators in those nations who are willingly serving US interests (Saudi Arabia, for instance).

The US notion of 'democracy', at least within the current administration, is surely Orwellian, avoiding anything that would allow for a genuine rule of the people. In nominal democracies today there is a huge gap between the ruling elites and the general populace. In this neo-con world, leaders regularly betray campaign promises and the public interest in order to serve the needs of the corporations who ensured their election victories. Nowhere has this reached such a high art form as in the United States.

Democracy has steadily eroded in the United States, accelerated by the present administration. The Patriot Act and its successor have castrated the constitutional protections of the rights of individuals; the courts have been filled with pliable right-wing judges, threatening judicial independence and constitutional rights; corrupt election practices are rampant and the checks and balances system has been seriously disrupted.

Killing the rest of us

The United States is a dirty place. Despite its millions of square miles of open space, it has allowed industry to turn large swaths of the environment into cesspools. Rivers and streams are polluted, food sources are contaminated with both inadvertent and deliberate chemical additives, in many places the air gives a foul stench. While the US is certainly not alone in the world in this regard, the sheer volume of pollution that is produced by this conspicuous consumption society is staggering.

American administrations, particularly the current one, blithely ignore the evidence that even school children can grasp. Scientists the world over, excepting those few on the payrolls of the polluters, have

been issuing dire predictions at least as far back as Rachel Carson's 1962 warning in her book 'Silent Spring'. But no, global warming isn't really happening; or if it is, it has nothing to do with any human activity. It is an interesting dichotomy that scientists are heeded by leaders so long as they are saying things the leaders want to hear, ignored otherwise.

But the rest of the world knows. That's why it struggled to produce what became known as the Kyoto Protocol after many attempts and many years of diplomacy. It is a horribly flawed agreement; but it is a first and critically necessary step to cleaning up our environment while there is some potable water and some breathable air remaining. The American response: the rest of the world can be damned, no one will tell them what to do.

Most of the world has reluctantly agreed that planting landmines is a nasty practice. While they may have had some military value in the days when troops rode horses or walked, their only value now is for containment of non-combatants. By far the greatest number of landmine victims in recent years is the population left behind when the armies go off to play elsewhere. The soldiers never remove the landmines so they remain buried, waiting for some unsuspecting peasant or child to die, or blow off a leg or two.

And so the world agreed to stop using them, to stop manufacturing, to remove all they could locate. The American response: they refused to sign on to anti-landmine treaties, they refused to remove those they have buried, they have recently decided to start manufacturing them again which can only mean that they intend to use them. The rest of the world be damned.

The United States has touted the need to control nuclear weaponry. However, if any further evidence was actually needed, their recent proposals to the United Nations draft agreement for reform make crystal clear that nuclear control is only for others. They have no intention of disarming, or reducing the nuclear stockpile, but everyone else should. And it is imperative that no additional countries gain nuclear weapon capability. The capability and right to obliterate mankind should rest entirely with the White House. The rest of the world be damned.

American soldiers have dropped depleted uranium (DU) on enemy combatants since 1991. It is lethal, it is horrid, and even though it doesn't have the bluster and showmanship of a mushroom cloud, it is still a nuclear bomb. It is one of the ironies of history: the United States went to war against Iraq in 2003 on the basis that Iraq was full of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) but finally they were forced to admit they were wrong and just couldn't find those weapons. So the US has deployed its own WMDs in Iraq, in the form of the DU cluster bombs.

The United States has a long history of manufacturing, storing, selling and deploying WMD. As far back as the Second World War, there is clear evidence of use by the United States of several chemicals which meet the current U.S. definition of WMD. Still, most of us who point fingers at the Americans are most familiar with their exploits in Vietnam. Agent Orange and napalm are the best known WMDs used in Vietnam although the Americans also deployed Agents White, Blue, Purple, Pink and Green.

These products are actually herbicides, developed during the 1940s, and were used in Vietnam as defoliants to strip away the grasses and trees in order to deny the enemy hiding places. Most are known carcinogens and their extensive use in Vietnam compromised the health of many who came in contact with them, including American forces; they were used in far greater concentrations than would be usual.

Napalm, or jellied gasoline, was also used as a defoliant in Vietnam but, unlike the Agents, it burned the vegetation and killed by incineration. And this was not the first or only use of this material: napalm bombs were dropped on Japan by Allied troops during World War II and used in flamethrowers against Germany in that same war. Later, it was used by United Nations forces during the Korean War before reaching the apex of its popularity during the Vietnam conflict. Although its use was banned by the United Nations in 1980, the United States did not sign the agreement. The rest of the world be damned.

The U.S. claimed to have destroyed all its supplies of napalm by 2001 but that is a matter of semantics rather than fact; current evidence seems to verify that they have used it as recently as 2003 in Iraq. A report carried in *The Independent* on August 10, 2003 quotes Colonel James Alles, commander of Marine Air Group 11:

"We napalmed both those [bridge] approaches. Unfortunately there were people there ... you could see them in the [cockpit] video. They were Iraqi soldiers. It's no great way to die. The generals love napalm. It has a big psychological effect."

The United States has denied using napalm but only because they have altered the petroleum distillate used and renamed the product the 'Mark 77 firebomb'. Its victims will surely appreciate the clarification.

While the United States remains the only nation to actually drop an atomic bomb on an enemy, there have been four occasions in the past 15 years where the United States has actually engaged in nuclear war: in the Balkans, in Afghanistan, and in Gulf Wars I & II – through the use of depleted uranium.

The use of DU is illegal under all international agreements, treaties, and covenants and it is illegal even under U.S. military law regarding WMDs. But in defiance of those international treaties, and its own laws, the United States continues to use this destructive material in full knowledge that its use could result in the slow annihilation of all species, including our own. The rest of the world be damned.

Evil Empire

Many will remember President Ronald Reagan referring to the former Soviet Union as the 'evil empire' but this is surely the chutzpah of the kettle calling the saucepan black.

There should be no misunderstanding about the seriousness of depleted uranium: it meets the U.S. definition of a 'weapon of mass destruction' and while the United States is prepared to invade sovereign countries on the basis they 'might' have WMD themselves and they 'might' be willing to use them, the Americans actually are using them. And they use them in complete disregard for the people and nations

on which they are dropped, even in disregard of the health of their own and allied troops. On that basis, there is some serious question as to whom has really earned the title 'Evil Empire'.

Today, the US is the most powerful nation on earth in every sense of the word, except moral. The moral authority of the United States comes from the barrel of a gun. It is feared worldwide, even by its friends, and dismayed that others don't unconditionally love it.

Most Americans claim to believe that the United States has been a monumental success. But perhaps it needs the eyes of people outside its borders to see clearly what it has become, that what it purported to be was rarely achieved. Americans have deluded themselves and fail to see the disaster they have wrought and the nightmare that is to come.

The United States is in decline, a society in an advanced state of decay. Its great experiment at participatory democracy no longer excites its people, who stay home on election days in vast numbers. Its love of freedom has been used over and over again as the excuse for military engagement on the soil of many other countries and countless deaths among those foreign citizens. Its pursuit of personal freedom at all costs has resulted in a violent and morally bankrupt society. In its quest for power, it has blundered across the world with the self-assurance of the Godly and with complete lack of concern for other people's wishes and needs, or lives.

The United States has relentlessly chased after the ability to annihilate its enemies with firepower beyond belief and has convinced itself that it is right and just to do so.

Neighbours

On January 6, 1941 a speech given by President Franklin Roosevelt, known as the Four Freedoms Speech, stated:

“We look forward to a world founded upon four essential freedoms. The first is freedom of speech and expression everywhere in the world. The second is freedom of every person to worship God in his (or her) own way—everywhere in the world. The third is freedom from want ... everywhere in the world. The fourth is freedom from fear ... anywhere in the world.”

Pretty simple. And it sounds pretty reasonable. But it was really a desperate attempt by FDR to save face since the founding principles of his presidency had failed so utterly.

In 1933, at his first inauguration, he espoused what he called his Good Neighbour Policy. It contained seven simple but clear proposals for how the US could fit into the world community without lowering its own standards and expectations.

Principle One: The first step toward being a good neighbor is to stop being a bad neighbor.

Principle Two: Our nation's foreign policy agenda must be tied to broad U.S. interests. To be effective

and win public support, a new foreign policy agenda must work in tandem with domestic policy reforms to improve security, quality of life, and basic rights in our own country.

Principle Three: Given that our national interests, security, and social well-being are interconnected to those of other peoples, U.S. foreign policy must be based on reciprocity rather than domination, mutual well-being rather than cutthroat competition, and cooperation rather than confrontation.

Principle Four: As the world's foremost power, the United States will be best served by exercising responsible global leadership and partnership rather than seeking global dominance.

Principle Five: An effective security policy must be two-pronged. Genuine national safety requires both a well-prepared military capable of repelling attacks on our country and a proactive commitment to improving national and personal security through nonmilitary measures and international cooperation.

Principle Six: The U.S. government should support sustainable development, first at home and then abroad, through its macroeconomic, trade, investment, and aid policies.

Principle Seven: A peaceful and prosperous global neighborhood depends on effective governance at national, regional, and international levels. Effective governance is accountable, transparent, and representative.

By the time of the Four Freedoms Speech, FDR knew he was not going to sell to the American people the notion that they should be part of the world community. The arrogance and hubris that drove the building of America had long ago precluded the notion that anyone else had relevance or was entitled to their place in the sun. The United States must rule, although it wasn't until after World War II that they began to export their military might to make sure they would rule.

Say Goodbye to Hollywood

The world no longer needs the United States. It is time the world ignored the United States and went about its business without this bully. For much of its history the US has practiced a form of isolationism (note its very late entry into World Wars I & II). It is time the rest of the world practiced reverse isolationism and locked the US out of the world community so it can do harm only to itself.

The US is in serious danger of collapsing on itself; moving it outside the realm of relations with other nations is the only way to ensure that other nations come to no harm when the US finally implodes.

And like a miscreant child sent to its room to think about what it has done, there is the possibility that the US will realize it has misbehaved and pledge itself anew to being a better person. But until it does, it should be shunned.