

Understanding the California Mind

Nancy Pelosi gave [a marathon speech](#) on illegal immigration the other day. But how would she know much about the realities of open borders, given her palatial retreat in Northern California and multi-millionaire lifestyle that allows wealthy progressives like herself to be exempt from the consequences of her own hectoring? In the end, the House minority leader was reduced to some adolescent racist patter about her grandson wishing to look more like his Mexican-American friend.

I was thinking of the San Francisco Democrat's speech last week, during a brief drive into our local town, in a region that is ground zero of California's illegal immigration experience.

Illegal immigrants are neither collective saints nor sinners, but simply individuals who arrive from one of the poorest regions in the Americas, without legality or much in the way of English, or high school education.

They encounter an American host that has lost confidence in its once formidable powers of assimilation and integration as well as its ability to mint Americans from diverse races, religions, and ethnicities. Instead, American culture has adopted an arrogant sense that it can ensure near instant parity as redemption for supposed past *-isms* and *-ologies*. That may explain the immigrant's romance for Mexico to which he fights any return, and the ambiguity about America in which he fights to stay.

We dare not mention illegal immigration in California as a factor in the state's implosion. But privately, residents assume it has something to do with the 20 percent of the

state's population that [lives below the poverty level](#). Illegal immigration plays a role in the fact that one-third of the nation's welfare recipients lives in California and that one of four state residents was not born in the United States—or that one-half of all immigrant households receives some sort of government assistance, and that one in four homeless people lives in California.

Note a final statistic. A record of nearly \$30 billion a year is forecast to be sent this year as remittances home to Mexico. If the sum is assumed to be wired largely by the reported 11 million illegal aliens, then illegal immigrants are sending per capita around \$2,700 home per year. Again, in per capita terms, a household of five would average about \$1,100 sent home *per month* to Mexico—a generosity impossible without the subsidies of the American taxpayer. (Some might wonder whether the U.S. could tax that sum to build the wall or at least declare that proof of remittances disqualifies one for public support.)

Much Ruin in a State

On the way to town, I passed three neighbors' parcels. All have something in common: several families are living on lots zoned for single-family residences in an array of illegal sheds, shacks, and stationary trailers. The premises are characterized by illegal dumping, zoning and building code violations, illegal electrical hook-ups, and petty misdemeanors of unlicensed dogs and strays. I remember similar such rural settlements from my early youth in the 1950s, over a decade after the final end of the Great Depression. Now, in our back-to-the-future state, we see some concrete reminders of what my parents used to relate about life in the 1930s.

In this strange "day in the life" melodrama, at the dry cleaner in town, a car collided with mine in the parking lot. We both got out to inspect the fender-bender damage (he had more damage—maybe in the range of \$500-800—than I did—probably around \$400). I showed him my license, registration, and

insurance authentication and asked him to do the same to complete the exchange of information.

But he seemed either to have no license, registration or insurance authentication or was reluctant to show me what he had. I suggested then that we call the police to verify our likely insurance claims, and let them determine whether either one of us was at fault. He said no and suggested instead cash, as if perceived comparative damage outweighed assigning culpability. He spoke limited English. I gave him \$50 in cash (all I had in my wallet) and he sped out. I figured that my damage would not have exceeded the insurance deductible and his was likely greater. I suppose he felt a possible insurance claim was not worth even theoretical exposure to deportation. Our negotiation was calm and respectful.

On the way home, I went a different route. The roadside of an adjoining farm parcel has become a veritable dump: I stopped and counted the following sorts of trash piled by the almond orchard: two infant car seats; one entertainment center, three bags of wet garbage, one mattress, one stroller, five tires, and a stack of broken cement, paint cans, and drywall.

Pulling into my driveway, I noticed that a pit bull mix had been dumped at my house during my brief absence (I have already five rescue dogs). We called the animal control officer and are waiting for a reply. I think the result will be predictable, as in the case of my recent misadventure in purchasing expensive solar panels: though they were installed over three months ago, I am still waiting for Pacific Gas and Electric Co., the local utility, to hook the idled system to the grid.

Some time ago I was bitten by two dogs while biking down a rural avenue nearby. The animals' owners did not speak English, refused to tie up the unlicensed and unvaccinated biters, and in fact let their other dogs out, one of which also bit me. It took four calls to various legal authorities

and a local congressional rep to have the dogs quarantined in an effort to avoid rabies shots. The owners were never cited.

The California solution is always the same: the law-abiding must adjust to the non-law-abiding. So I quit riding out here and they kept their unvaccinated, unlicensed, and untied dogs.

All that is a pretty typical day, in a way that would have been atypical some 40 years ago.

Traveling Halfway in Reverse

In California, civilization is speeding in reverse—well aside from the decrepit infrastructure, dismal public schools, and sky-high home prices. Or rather, the state travels halfway in reverse: anything involving the private sector (smartphones, Internet, new cars, TV, or getting solar panels installed) is 21st-century. Anything involving the overwhelmed government or public utilities (enforcing dumping laws, licensing dogs, hooking up solar panel meters to the grid, observing common traffic courtesies) is early 20th-century.

Why is this so, and how do Californians adjust?

They accept a few *unspoken* rules of state behavior and then use their resources to navigate around them.

1) Law enforcement in California hinges on ignoring felonies to focus on misdemeanors and infractions. Or rather, if a Californian is deemed to be law-abiding, a legal resident, and with some means, the regulatory state will audit, inspect, and likely fine his property and behavior in hopes of raising revenue. That is a safe means of compensating for the reality that millions, some potentially dangerous, are not following the law, and can only be forced to comply at great cost and in a fashion that will seem politically incorrect.

The practical result of a schizophrenic postmodern regulatory and premodern frontier state? Throw out onto the road three sacks of garbage with your incriminating power bill in them,

or dump the cooking oil of your easily identifiable mobile canteen on the side of the road, and there are no green consequences. Install a leach line that ends up one foot too close to a water well, and expect thousands of dollars of fines or compliance costs.

2) Elite progressive virtue-signaling is in direct proportion to elite apartheid: the more one champions green statutes, the plight of illegal aliens, the need for sanctuary cities, or the evils of charter schools, so all the more the megaphone is relieved that housing prices are high and thus exclusionary to “them.”

The more likely one associates with the privileged, so too the more one avoids those who seem to be impoverished or residing illegally, and the more one is likely to put his children in expensive and prestigious private academies. One’s loud ideology serves as a psychosocial means of squaring the circle of living in direct antithesis to one’s professions. (I do not know how the new federal tax law will affect California’s liberal pieties, given the elite will see their now non-deductible state taxes effectively double.)

3) California is no longer really a single state. Few in the Bay Area have ever been to the southern Sierra Nevada foothill communities, or the west side of the Central Valley, or the upper quarter of the state. Coastal California is simply far more left-wing than other blue states; interior California is far more right-wing than most red states; increasingly, the former dictate to and rule the latter.

The sharp divide between Massachusetts and Mississippi requires 1,500 miles; in California, the similar cultural distance is about 130 miles from Menlo Park to Mendota. Add [California’s neo-Confederate ideas](#) into the equation—such as nullification and sanctuary cities—and we seem on the verge of some sort of secession. (Would the Central Valley follow the path of West Virginia, split off, and remain in the Union?)

4) The postmodern 21st-century state media in its various manifestations is committed to social justice, not necessarily to disinterested reporting. Few read about [environmental lawsuits](#) over the planned pathway of a disruptive high-speed rail project; not so in the case of [planned state nullification](#) of offshore drilling.

In many news accounts, the race and ethnicity of a violent criminal are deduced in the cynical (and often quite illiberal) reader comments that follow. Is the newspaper deliberately suppressing news information to incite readership, who, in turn, through their commentaries flesh out the news that is not reported and simultaneously spike online viewership by their lurid outrage?

Folk wisdom in California translates into something along the following lines: an unidentified “suspect” in a drunk driving accident that leaves two dead on the side of the road can for some time remain unidentified; a local accountant of the wrong profile who is indicted by the IRS has his name and picture blurred.

Progressive Winners and Losers

There are progressive exceptions: universities—in email blast warnings to students and faculty about mere suspects seen on campus in connection with reported burglaries or sexual assaults—are not shy in providing physical characteristics, dress, and perceived racial identities. The media, in other words, feels by massaging its coverage of California realities, it can serve an invaluable role in guiding us to our fated progressive futures—with exceptions for income and class.

Californians, both the losers and beneficiaries of these unspoken rules, have lost confidence in the equal application of the law and indeed the idea of transparent and meritocratic government.

Cynicism is rampant. Law-abiding Californians do whatever is necessary not to come to the attention of any authorities, whose desperate need for both revenue and perceived social justice (150,000 households in a state of 40 million residents pay about 50 percent of California income tax revenue) is carnivorous.

A cynical neighbor once summed up the counter-intuitive rules to me: if you are in a car collision, hope that you are hit by, rather than hit an illegal alien. If someone breaks into your home and you are forced to use a firearm, hope that you are wounded nonlethally in the exchange, at least more severely than is the intruder. And if you are cited by an agency, hope it is for growing an acre of marijuana rather than having a two-foot puddle on your farm classified as an inland waterway.

I could add a fourth: it is always legally safer to allow your dog to be devoured by a stray pit-bull than to shoot the pit-bull to save your dog.

In the former case, neither the owner nor the state ever appears; in the latter both sometimes do.

In a state where millions cannot be held accountable, those who can will be—both to justify a regulatory octopus, and as social justice for their innate unwarranted privilege.

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