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FOOD AND CHEAP LABOR

by Jonathan Wilson

When one sees an impoverished Peruvian farmer, considered wealthy in his local environment, sporting a yoked team of oxen pulling a wooden plow to cultivate a postage-stamp-sized parcel of poor soil, you know there has to be a lesson to be learned, maybe more.

Unwittingly, and in the name of compassion, governments and religious institutions are persuaded to provide some sustenance for the destitute. On the face of it that would appear to be a good thing -- even altruistic. But, as with all animals that are able to eat, the destitute, fed, will inevitably reproduce. In this case, they will reproduce offspring into similarly destitute circumstances where the only "opportunity" is to offer up meager skills and labor for slave wages, pending a premature death. They are without the ability to organize, the potential to bargain for better pay, or recourse to rectify deplorably dangerous working conditions. The more successfully it is possible to provide more of them with minimal sustenance, the more they reproduce, thus generating ever more cheap labor to feed the interests of those, by accident, born into the midst of affluence.

The phenomenon moves around the world in two directions. It permeates the United States, for example, through undocumented immigration to the tune of an estimated 12,000,000 people seeking to work for somewhat better slave wages and marginally better working conditions. Labor seeking out capital, as it were, like water seeking its own level. It moves the other direction when US companies and others build factories in the midst of such poverty in the undeveloped world to manufacture goods for export to affluent consumers. Capital seeking out less expensive labor. That, in turn, puts pressure on unions in the US and likewise compromises the ability of American workers to organize, bargain for better pay, or demand better working conditions. The decline of unions and their influence in the United States is *not* accidental, however much we might like to think so. It's not because American workers merely lack the ambition and abilities required to organize and bargain collectively, and it's not because they think that they simply have it good enough or deserve and aspire to nothing better.

There are many who enjoy the way things are, the abundance into which we have been born, and the status quo that preserves our enviable circumstances. Most never travel, lack education about macro-economics, and remain relatively oblivious to the de-humanizingly vicious cycle that the status quo maintains. Many are only vaguely aware of the plight of the less fortunate and the forces that perpetuate the disadvantages. These indifferent souls, who have been born on third base, go through life thinking they hit a triple. They, too frequently, lack the ability or ambition to hit even a single beyond their status, so with few exceptions they live happily enough in their ignorance and accidental good fortune, dying somewhat contentedly on third base where they began. Worst among them are the so-called "Christians" who have conveniently adopted and perpetuated as truth the myth that the plenty they enjoy is a function of their virtue, devout prayer, and a benevolent God who appreciates, and thus rewards, their fealty. In fact, their God appears to be taking better care of the sparrows, who have no concept of God, than God does of most of their fellow human beings around the globe.

Food, birth control, education, and capital represent the four indispensable elements that are necessary to break the cycle of disparate circumstance and opportunity around the world. Food and capital, without the other two, perpetuate the status quo. Birth control alone is geno-

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CALENDAR

- ▼ The next FFBC meeting is 7:00 A.M., Friday, January 8, 2009 at Hoyt Sherman Place.
- Join Warren Blumenfeld, specialist in gender studies and multiculturalism.
- ▼
- ▼ R.S.V.P. by Tuesday January 5 to JonathanWilson@davisbrownlaw.com or 288-2500 by phone.

(Continued from page 1)

cide. Education by itself breeds revolution. Together, these four, coupled with inheritance taxes, would level the playing field in relatively short order, and create a world-wide environment that, in each succeeding generation, rewards industry in education, invention, productivity, and individual achievement.

Errata (from December issue)

A paragraph was cut off from Mr Wilson's December article. Here is the exciting conclusion.

...The bottom line is that if we want a better world for ourselves, others, and our progeny, we need to get off our knees and get busy. As has been aptly said, "God has no hands but our hands." St. Teresa of Avila (1515-1582).

Speaker for December: Peter Pintus

By Bruce Carr

Our speaker on December 4 was the Rev. Dr. Peter Pintus, an extraordinary religious and social leader in Des Moines, who gave us an articulate and passionate plea for tolerance and diversity, grounded in his own extraordinary life. This reporter has never observed our breakfast-room so silent and so riveted as it was while he told his remarkable story.

Born in Berlin in 1927, just before Hitler announced the "Third Reich" in 1933 (Peter remembers gathering around the radio to hear the speech), he began life as the son of a wealthy ironworks owner with a posh apartment just off the Potsdamer Platz, servants, opera and concerts--all the signs of worldly success. Yes, he was bullied as a Jew in public school, but the family was at first spared the most violent excesses of Nazi repression because his mother was not Jewish--the family was, officially at least, partly Aryan. Even after the "Kristallnacht" [Night of the Broken Glass] of November 1938, which initiated vicious anti-Jewish pogroms throughout the Reich, they still managed to keep their home.

But eventually Peter's mother buckled under the pressure and, imitating a dear elderly neighbor, took her own life with an overdose. Their protection gone, Peter and his father were arrested as non-Aryans, their property was seized, and they were sent to a slave-labor camp. It was a highly secret munitions factory being dug out of a former salt-mine, far beneath the radar of the Allies and most Germans. They kept surviving despite brutal treatment. As the Allies moved in early in 1945, however, the Nazis started rounding up even the slaves for transportation to death camps. Alerted, Peter and a buddy staged a dramatic run for their lives, lived like beasts for a week in the forest, and "surrendered" to an Allied officer just before they starved to death.

Released after the fighting stopped, Peter made his way back to Berlin (the apartment house was a shell), found his father, and considered--as an angry, dispossessed, unemployed 18-year-old--what to do. Not a good time. But some inner strength, he said, made him realize at last that his anger was going to kill him if he did not let it go. About this time he met Eva, who would become his wife in 1948 and with him created a family (now numbering five children, ten grandchildren, and starting on great-grandchildren) that has sustained them to this day.

Peter's journeys since then--physical, educational, professional, and spiritual--would make another morning's presentation. He has worked and contributed as a teacher, minister, business manager, social worker, counselor, and chaplain. (When I first met him, in 1994, he had just been ordained an Episcopal priest!) For over a decade in Des Moines he has volunteered his services as a chaplain in the Iowa Health Services hospital system, offering substance abuse counseling and support for families in need. As Temple B'nai Jeshurun noted upon presenting him the Torchbearer's Award in 2004, "Peter has been a continuous thread of spiritual leadership to the Temple community. He has provided tireless support to us--guiding Shabbat services, sharing with us our joys and sorrows, listening to our problems, encouraging us, and being part of our many individual and congregational accomplishments." He is an active board member of the Des Moines Area Religious Council and past-president of the Des Moines Ministerial Association.

And always, he travels as an ambassador to schools, colleges, universities, and civic organizations wanting to listen and learn about the Holocaust and intolerance in Nazi Germany. As a Survivor, Peter Pintus has shared his appalling experiences with thousands of listeners. His message calls to consciousness the worth of persons, acceptance, and tolerance as a way of life. We were privileged to hear it.

Walk Through Finances Before Strolling Down the Aisle

By Ryan Weidner of Edward Jones

If you are planning to exchange vows, you have obviously got plenty to think about beforehand. In the midst of going over wedding plans, do not neglect a topic that will be important during your entire married life - your finances.

Open and honest communication is the key to a successful marriage, and communicating about finances is essential. That is why you will want to work now by learning how you and your partner's finances and financial attitudes fit together.

Of course, you may be thinking that talking about money during the pre-wedding rush can add to the stress of what may already be a hectic time. If you just set aside a few hours on a day when you have no other plans, you should be able to make progress. In any case, you certainly need to address your financial circumstances and attitudes on a regular basis throughout your marriage. For starters, though, here are a few questions to ask each other:

· *What are your financial assets?* - You will want to find out the scope of each other's assets: savings, investments, retirement

The Blind Side

Review by
Gary Kaufman

The Blind Side, a film directed by lawyer-turned-film-director John Lee Hancock, is a very emotional, uplifting film. For all its sports trappings, **The Blind Side** is really a movie that shows the importance of relationships to human beings and how much we can positively affect each other's lives if we only reach out. Michael Oher, a homeless African-American, is first spotted playing basketball in a playground in Memphis, Tennessee, by a private Christian high school coach. Michael, generally known as "Big Mike" is a behemoth compared to the high school students his age and demonstrates good athletic ability on the court. Coach Cotton pleads to school admissions to accept the child not because of his athletic ability, but because it is the Christian thing to do. They buy it, and Michael is admitted to Wingate Christian School, which proudly proclaims "With Men, This Is Possible, With God All Things Are Possible" on its campus gate. Although the coach is excited, the instructors are not. Michael has a 0.6 grade point average, is uncommunicative, and has an IQ of 80 which is in the 6th percentile. He tests high in only one area, protective instincts.

Leigh Anne Tuchy (Sandra Bullock), a successful interior designer, is used to getting her way. When she spots poor Michael on a cold rainy night out on the streets, she insists he come and spend Thanksgiving Eve at their plush mansion. "It is just for one night, isn't it?" questioned her husband, Sean Tuchy (Tim McGraw). But it wasn't just for one night. Leigh Ann's heart goes out to Michael, and she buys him clothes, he partakes in a Thanksgiving meal with a family, and when she gives him a room of his own with a bed in it he says, "Never had one before." "What, a room to yourself?" asks Leigh Ann. "A bed," Mike replies. Leigh Ann is visibly moved by this revelation. Soon a dedicated teacher at Mike's school retrieves a discarded piece of paper of his that is written so poetically it clearly illustrates that Michael is not stupid. She continues to work with Mike and discovers he does much better if an exam is done orally. By the instructors working with Mike and with Leigh Anne's addition of a personal tutor, Miss Sue (Kathy Bates), Michael's grades improve to the point where he can go out for sports.

There is a lot of humor in this feel-good movie. The relationship between the youngest of the Tuchy family, SJ (Jae Head), and Michael is a real gem. To see the diminutive SJ running his giant "brother" through football drills is a real hoot, and as colleges become more interested in Michael for a football scholarship, SJ turns into a clever and shrewd negotiating partner. But the hoped for superstar is a dud on the gridiron until, taking advantage of Michael's natural protective instincts, Leigh Anne pep talks Michael into acting like his fellow teammates are members of his family, and when they are threatened he needs to protect them. With this visualization, Michael turns into a football playing powerhouse, and soon all the southern football coaches (most played by the actual coaches themselves, such as Lou Holtz and Nick Saban) are coming to his practices eager to sign him up to play on their college teams.

You will find yourself becoming emotionally involved

in each of Michael's triumphs as he slowly develops mentally, emotionally, and physically through the interaction of positive relationships with others. It is based on a true story, and during the ending credits, photos of the real Michael Oher, his family, and his tutor, are shown. It is a gem to be enjoyed this Holiday Season.

Finances Before Marriage (cont)

plans, etc. This information will serve as a foundation from which you can base your short- and long-term financial goals (e.g. buying a house and saving for retirement).

· *What are your debts?* It may be hard to discuss each other's financial obligations, but it is vitally important that you share this because you may end up sharing some debts. Find out about student loans, car loans, mortgages, credit cards (everything). While going over these debts, you may discover ideas about how you can benefit from consolidation.

· *What expenses shall we share?* Most married couples face the "two checkbook or one" question, but there is no one "right" answer. How you handle the payment of living expenses is a personal matter. Many couples have found workable solutions by paying major expenses -mortgage, cars, utilities, etc.- out of a joint checking account, while still maintaining separate accounts to handle incidentals, gifts, and other costs incurred by just one partner.

· *What type of investor are you?* You might think that having a different investment personality than your partner would not be a big deal. Yet, a substantial number of couples do experience tension when one partner wants to invest much more aggressively than the other. While there is nothing wrong with maintaining separate investment accounts, you may find that, as a couple, you actually do better by pooling resources into joint investments. In this case, each partner may have to accept more risk or reduced volatility in investments. As you shape your investment portfolio, you should work with a financial professional, someone who knows your collective needs and goals, and who can recommend a course suitable for your common interests.

Going over your finances might not be as much fun as planning a honeymoon, but it can definitely help you build a harmonious life together.

BRIEFS & SHORTS

Be sure to RSVP for the January 8 meeting no later than January 5. E-mail JonathanWilson@davisbrownlaw.com or call him at 288-2500. Our speaker will be Warren Blumenfeld, specialist in gender studies and multiculturalism .

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NOTICE: SINCE THE FIRST FRIDAY IN JANUARY 2010 IS ON JANUARY 1, THE JANUARY MEETING HAS BEEN MOVED TO JANUARY 8. BE SURE TO MARK YOUR CALENDAR

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News & Views*

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My M. O. (Monthly Observations)

Endangered Species?

I went to Google and typed in the word, "Tiger." I hoped that the initial hit would be for the endangered species of one of the Big Four in wild cats, but I wasn't surprised that the first hit was about Tiger Woods. I was, however, pleased that the second hit dealt with the 600 pound animal that inhabits Asia's jungles. As I began to read about the beautiful striped cat, three headings proclaimed why the animal is endangered: habitat destruction, fragmentation, and hunting. As I pondered those three headings, it struck me that Tiger Woods's endangered status could very well incorporate those same ideas. His habitat destruction began with his infamous automobile accident which then spiraled into fragmentation of his family life, a direct result of his hunting for sexual satisfaction beyond his marriage.

Are you tired of the brouhaha regarding Tiger Woods? I have to admit I am. Truthfully, I've never understood the world-wide obsession with golf in the first place. However, since it is an individual sport, and given that Tiger Woods plays the game so well, I accept that many people are fascinated with the sexual indiscretions of someone who had such a squeaky-clean image.

I have a theory regarding Tiger's behavior: I believe he was, and probably still is, clinically depressed. Depression is a vicious state that manifests itself in numerous clandestine ways. I know because I went through it a number of years ago. Frequently, an affected person doesn't even realize he is in a deep depression. Tiger's father died three years ago. According to all reports, the two were very close. When a person loses such a loved one, the "normal" stages of grief can be prolonged in some people. When everyone else believes that grief has been put behind, the mind, in its intricate patterns, doesn't always go by conventional wisdom and the neat patterns that so many people believe in. I think that explains Tiger's excessive behavior with all those women.

Entirely unrelated to depression, however, it appears to me that heterosexism raised its ugly head during this entire "affair" (forgive the pun). I believe if Tiger Woods's numerous assignations had occurred with "members" (forgive the pun again) of the male gender rather than curvaceous females, his many sporty sponsors who provide him with millions of dollars would have dropped their endorsements the first day after the news broke rather than prolonging their eventual disengagement. Such is the "wink, wink" mentality of the heterosexual world. As the alleged number of women in Tiger's life expanded to more than a dozen, even the "good old boys" had to rethink their strategy in dealing with the most popular golfer in the world.

As we ring in the New Year, I hope Tiger Woods will be able to sort out his various problems, and for his own sake, I hope he will seek the guidance of a good psychiatrist. He will do more good for himself and his family if he does so. It may well take all of 2010 before he begins to emerge from his current nightmare, but emerge he will in one way or another. I wish him, and all of the readers of the First Friday Breakfast Club Newsletter, the very best for 2010.

Steve Person

*Time makes ancient good uncouth.—James Russell
Lowell (1819– 1891)*
