



G. MOSS

FIN de SIÈCLE AMERIKA

BY MICHAEL PAUL McCUSKER

"Government is best when closest to the people."
 ~THOMAS JEFFERSON

The manner in which great powers decline is wild extravagance at the top and misery at the bottom. The United States is a spectacular example. Two Americas have developed, one rich and privileged, the other exploited and heavily taxed, with separate sets of laws governing each. As the importance of wealth, no matter how acquired, assumes greater influence, the social inequities between the wealthy and the not so wealthy are accentuated.

At the present time the wealthy 10% of the population owns about 65% of the nation's net worth while the bottom half has only 4%. Legalized deceptions allow wealthy individuals and the richest corporations to escape with little or no tax payments while the shrinking middle class and the poor pay punitive taxes to make up the deficit; and their taxes pay the huge bailouts of expensive fraud and mismanagement by these same high-roller entrepreneurs and corporations. The biggest crimes in a nation haunted and infuriated with crime are not committed by poor blacks as politicians claim to frighten the electorate but by white businessmen who steal billions of dollars of public investments.

The plutocrats who control the country's major political parties claim that the economy defines the nation more than its ideology: money is the nation's ideology. What they mean by their strict interpretation of the "economy" is their own personal domination of the nation's wealth. Narrow monetary policies that singularly benefit the upper layers of society draw money from less well-off levels which keeps them less well off and always

under pressure to pay what is demanded. Releasing public money (most of it pried from middle class and blue-collar workers) to businessmen and the wealthy elite is considered good, even essential to the economy. Feeding the poor or providing them adequate shelter and medical care, or even educating them, is regarded as uneconomical and a drain on the nation's treasury.

In theory everybody has an equal chance to make a buck and live the American Dream in pursuit of happiness, but of course some are more equal than others in intelligence and capability or just plain luck (or cupidity). A few of these happy fortunates share their good fortune but the majority hog what they accumulate and increase it at the expense and labor of others whom they prevent from equally sharing in the worth of their production, and such notions of equity are dismissed as socialism or politically correct. Yet the real purpose of the American experiment is that human beings should be able to coexist as equals, not necessarily in wealth or advantage but in basic rights and liberties and equally share in power, and that none should be denied these whatever their wealth or advantage.

The imbalance that has rotted the core of our democracy has produced mendacious mediocrity at the upper levels of governance. We are governed by pious hypocrites who are mostly white males in a nation in which women are the majority and the great variety of races outnumber Caucasians. Women have made it into the middle level of politics, as have a few blacks, Hispanics and Asian-Americans: but for the present and probably beyond the end of the century the top national positions are closed to all but a small club of white males, a minority of upper class men who strain to hold onto power,

clinging desperately, defiantly and ruthlessly to their peculiar form of country club apartheid.

The recent collapse of the Democratic Party has left a black hole in the center of American politics. The Party's own center has fallen out, deserted to the Republican Superparty, leaving disenfranchised minorities clinging to a disintegrating corona. Perhaps like the Soviet Communist Party its ruins should be abandoned, the surviving fragments reformed into a new party or a multitude of parties that might at least reflect the disparate new majorities that have moved into the American electorate but so far have not gained real or representative power.

The Democratic Party is traditionally the party of working people and minorities. Though its history is hardly glorious — in particular its advocacy of Southern apartheid a century ago — the Democratic Party usually, though reluctantly and always narrowly, encompasses a mixed variety of ideas, philosophies and cultural styles that would otherwise find expression in other parties, which generally have little chance against the prevalent two party system. Jammed uncomfortably into this single political party alongside a now virtually vanished core of strict constructionists are liberals, leftists, trade unionists, environmentalists, minority groups, feminists and others who might be regarded as free thinkers and heretics.

While the Republican Party generally represents the aspirations and pretensions of wealthy Tories and plutocrats and would more likely include proto-Nazis than fuzzy-headed liberals, the Democrats switched their antebellum loyalties at the end of the last century to embrace the hordes of impoverished Mediterranean and Eastern European immigrants who were imported to work in the rapidly expanding American industrial



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