

PART VIII

---

RANDOM THOUGHTS



## Random Thoughts

**R**andom thoughts on the passing scene:

One of the sad signs of our times is that we have demonized those who produce, subsidized those who refuse to produce, and canonized those who complain.

Everything is relative. In much of coastal California, Ted Kennedy would be politically middle of the road—and, in San Francisco, right of center.

My computer operating system is so out of date that people don't even write viruses for it any more.

Politics is the art of making your selfish desires seem like the national interest.

If navel-gazing, hand-wringing or self-dramatization helped with racial issues, we would have achieved Utopia long ago.

People who cannot be bothered to learn both sides of the issues should not bother to vote.

Impractical men especially need to get married. The problem is that practical women may have better sense than to marry them.

The old adage about giving a man a fish versus teaching him how to fish has been updated by a reader: Give a man a fish and he will ask for tartar sauce and French fries! Moreover,

some politician who wants his vote will declare all these things to be among his “basic rights.”

There are people who can neither find happiness in their own lives nor permit those around them to be happy. The best you can do is get such people out of your life.

What is called an educated person is often someone who has had a dangerously superficial exposure to a wide spectrum of subjects.

If the battle for civilization comes down to the wimps versus the barbarians, the barbarians are going to win.

I am going to stop procrastinating—one of these days.

Thanksgiving may be our most old-fashioned holiday. Gratitude itself seems out of date at a time when so many people feel “entitled” to whatever they get—and indignant that they didn’t get more.

When this column predicted that a discredited study would continue to be cited by gun control advocates, I had no idea that it would happen the next week in the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals.

It is a little much when people come to this country preaching hatred against others and demanding tolerance for themselves.

It may be expecting too much to expect most intellectuals to have common sense, when their whole life is based on their being uncommon—that is, saying things that are different from what everyone else is saying. There is only so much genuine originality in anyone. After that, being

uncommon means indulging in pointless eccentricities or clever attempts to mock or shock.

As I try to clear out the paper jungle in my office, my wife has suggested using dynamite. But I am saving that as Plan B.

Those who want to take our money and gain power over us have discovered the magic formula: Get us envious or angry at others and we will surrender, in installments, not only our money but our freedom. The most successful dictators of the 20th century—Hitler, Lenin, Stalin, Mao—all used this formula and now class warfare politicians here are doing the same.

Everyone is for “due process” in our courts. But the very concept of due process implies that there can be such a thing as undue process. Unfortunately, undue process is also found in our courts—perhaps more often than due process.

As a black man, I am offended when white people take the likes of Al Sharpton seriously—or pretend to.

The scariest thing about politics today is not any particular policy or leaders, but the utter gullibility with which the public accepts notions for which there is not a speck of evidence, such as the benefits of “diversity,” the dangers of “overpopulation,” and innumerable other fashionable dogmas.

People who are very aware that they have more knowledge than the average person are often very unaware that they do not have one-tenth of the knowledge of all of the average persons put together.

Immigration has become one of a growing number of issues that can no longer be discussed rationally, but must be discussed only in pious shibboleths.

Watching CNN after watching Fox News Network is like drinking skim milk after you have gotten used to egg nog.

A lot of what is called “public service” consists of making hoops for other people to jump through. It is a great career for those who cannot feel fulfilled unless they are telling other people what to do.

The Empire State Building was built in less time than has already been spent debating what to build on the site of the World Trade Center.

One of these days the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals may declare the Constitution unconstitutional.

Everything depends on what you are used to. There is a story about a man from Los Angeles who went up to a mountaintop, took a deep breath of the clear fresh air and said: “What’s that funny smell?”

The end of the Cold War now reveals that many on the far left who were thought of as pro-Communist were in fact anti-American—as they have remained, even as our enemies have changed.

I hate to think that someday Americans will be looking at the radioactive ruins of their cities and saying that this happened because their leaders were afraid of the word “unilateral.”

There is no excuse for sending grossly abused children back

to their abusive parents, when there are plenty of people who want to adopt a child—and who are being put through the wringer by the same social workers who want to give terrible parents second, third, and fourth chances.

People who enjoy meetings should not be in charge of anything.

My favorite New Year's resolution was to stop trying to reason with unreasonable people. This has reduced both my correspondence and my blood pressure.

E-mail from the mother of a late-talking child: "We didn't know Ryan could read letters and numbers until one day when he was two-and-a-half years old and I held up a number 9 and asked him what it was. He turned his back to me, bent over, looked between his legs and said, '6.' Then he stood up, faced me and said, '9!'"

Activism is a way for useless people to feel important, even if the consequences of their activism are counterproductive for those they claim to be helping and damaging to the fabric of society as a whole.

It is amazing that people who think we cannot afford to pay for doctors, hospitals, and medications somehow think that we can afford to pay for doctors, hospitals, medications and a government bureaucracy to administer "universal health care."

No matter how much people on the left talk about compassion, they have no compassion for the taxpayers.

Intellectuals may like to think of themselves as people who

“speak truth to power” but too often they are people who speak lies to gain power.

Why do actors—people whose main talent is faking emotions—think that their opinions should be directing the course of political events in the real world? Yet it is a mistake that they have been making as far back as John Wilkes Booth.

Although rank-and-file terrorists are sent out on suicide missions, many of the leaders who send them out have been captured alive. I wonder if this will cause some second thoughts—or perhaps first thoughts—among their followers.

Much of what is promoted as “critical thinking” in our public schools is in fact uncritical negativism towards the history and institutions of America and an uncritical praise of the cultures of foreign countries and domestic minorities.

Too many critics of missile defense start the argument in the middle, with enemy missiles already in the air. But, if a missile defense system simply creates enough serious doubt in an enemy’s mind as to whether his missiles will get through, then it has done its job.

People who send me letters or e-mails containing belligerent personal attacks probably have no idea how reassuring their messages are, for they show that critics seldom have any rational arguments to offer.

France has never gotten over the fact that it was once a great power and is now just a great nuisance.

Sometimes life seems like Italian opera music—beautiful but heart-breaking.



Considering how often throughout history even intelligent people have been proved to be wrong, it is amazing that there are still people who are convinced that the only reason anyone could possibly say something different from what they believe is stupidity or dishonesty.

While it is true that you learn with age, the down side is that what you learn is often what a damn fool you were before.

Ask anyone who is suffering the agonies of some terrible disease whether he believes that there is such a thing as reality, or whether he thinks it is all just a matter of “perceptions.” The pompous but silly notion that it is all a matter of how you choose to look at things is an indulgence for those who are insulated from suffering, from accountability, and from reality.

A reader has suggested that elections be held on April 16th—the day after we pay our income taxes. That is one of the few things that might discourage politicians from being big spenders.

A reader writes: “I want to live in the country I grew up in. Where is it?”

If you talk to yourself, at least carry a cell phone, so that people won’t think you are crazy.

Judges should ask themselves: Are we turning the law into a trap for honest people and a bonanza for charlatans?

When youngsters say that “everybody” does this or that, it probably never occurs to them that what they call “everybody” is probably less than one percent of the human race.

Some full professors could more accurately be described as empty professors.

Why is there so much hand-wringing about how to keep track of violent sex offenders after they have been released from prison? If it is so dangerous to release them, then why are they being released, when laws can be rewritten to keep them behind bars?

Both the Sicilian mafia and the criminal tongs in China began as movements to defend the oppressed, so perhaps we should not be so painfully surprised that venerable American civil rights organizations have begun to degenerate into extortion rackets.

The next time you hear an alarming speech about “global warming” on Earth Day, just remember that the first Earth Day featured alarms about the danger of a new ice age.

Too often what are called “educated” people are simply people who have been sheltered from reality for years in ivy-covered buildings. Those whose whole careers have been spent in ivy-covered buildings, insulated by tenure, can remain adolescents on into their golden retirement years.

Some ideas sound so plausible that they can fail nine times in a row and still be believed the tenth time. Other ideas sound so implausible that they can succeed nine times in a row and still not be believed the tenth time. Government controls in the economy are among the first kinds of ideas and the operations of a free market are among the second kind.

It is amazing how many people seem to think that the government exists to turn their prejudices into laws.

One of the sad signs of our times are the twisted metal “sculptures” put in front of public buildings at the taxpayers’ expense—obviously never intended to please the public, and in fact constituting a thumbing of the artist’s nose at the public.

“Tell all” autobiographies sometimes tell more than all.

Would you prefer to have a “compulsory” health care system imposed on you and your doctor or to have “universal” health care? Or do you realize that they are the same thing in different words?

You can fail to achieve any of the things you planned and still live a happy and fulfilled life, because of opportunities that come along that you never planned for. But these opportunities can be missed if you stick doggedly to your preconceived blueprint.

Being slick is what keeps some people from being intelligent.

People have a right to their own cultures—even Americans. Those who come here and say that they cannot follow some of our laws that conflict with their culture are free to leave.

Much of what are called “social problems” consists of the fact that intellectuals have theories that do not fit the real world. From this they conclude that it is the real world which is wrong and needs changing.

Some of the questions on the California High School Exit Exam are the kinds of questions whose answers you would have been expected to know before you got into high school in past generations.

Although my wife and I live a modest life, I am amazed at the bills that come in each month—and I can't help wondering how people who live it up manage to make ends meet.

Tony Snow of Fox News seems to be the only one in the media who has pointed out what a farce it is for people to be talking about a tax cut in terms of so many billions of dollars. Government can only change the tax rates. How much the tax revenue will change—and in which direction—will be known only after the fact.

Thank heaven human beings are born with an ability to laugh at absurdity. Otherwise, we might go stark raving mad from all the absurd things we encounter in life.

The best thing about buying a house is that it puts an end to the exhausting process of house-hunting.

Although Ronald Reagan was the only actor to become President, he was one of the few politicians who was not acting.

A recently reprinted memoir by Frederick Douglass has footnotes explaining what words like “arraigned,” “curried” and “exculpate” meant, and explaining who Job was. In other words, this man who was born a slave and never went to school educated himself to the point where his words now have to be explained to today's expensively under-educated generation.

Too many in the media act as if decency is a violation of the First Amendment.

People sometimes ask if I have tried to convince black

“leaders” to take a different view on racial issues. Of course not. I wouldn’t spend my time trying to persuade the mafia to give up crime. Why should I spend time trying to convince race hustlers to give up victimhood? It’s their bread and butter.

Egalitarians create the most dangerous inequality of all—inequality of power. Allowing politicians to determine what all other human beings will be allowed to earn is one of the most reckless gambles imaginable. Like the income tax, it may start off being applied only to the rich but it will inevitably reach us all.

To too many teachers, social workers and others in occupations with pretensions of being “professional,” what being a professional means is not having to listen to common sense from ordinary people, much less develop any of their own.

Great Predictions Department: “I do not mind saying I think they are taking a gamble.” That was Red Sox owner Harry Frazee after selling Babe Ruth to the Yankees.

Those who are preoccupied with “making a statement” usually don’t have any statements worth making.

A magician was asked what had happened to the lady he used to saw in half in his act. “Oh, she’s retired,” he said. “Now she lives in Chicago—and Denver.”

Despite the rhetoric of the “haves” and the “have-nots” that is so dear to the heart of the political left, a more accurate description of most Americans today would be the “have-lots” and the “have-lots-more.”

The people I feel sorry for are those who do 90 percent of what it takes to succeed.

Trust is one of those things that is much easier to maintain than it is to repair.

It is self-destructive for any society to create a situation where a baby who is born into the world today automatically has pre-existing grievances against another baby born at the same time, because of what their ancestors did centuries ago. It is hard enough to solve our own problems, without trying to solve our ancestors' problems.

Don't you love it when the intelligentsia condemn the United States for responding "unilaterally" after we are attacked, instead of waiting for the approval of that confusion of voices known as "world opinion"?

Have you ever heard a single hard fact to back up all the sweeping claims for the benefits of "diversity"?

Ask ten people what "fairness" means and you can get eleven different definitions. Expecting government to promote "fairness" is just giving politicians more arbitrary power.

We seem to be getting closer and closer to a situation where nobody is responsible for what they did but we are all responsible for what somebody else did.

As long as human beings are imperfect, there will always be arguments for extending the power of government to deal with these imperfections. The only logical stopping place is totalitarianism—unless we realize that tolerating imperfections is the price of freedom.

The people I feel sorry for are those who insist on continuing to do what they have always done but want the results to be different from what they have always been.

Alaska is much larger than France and Germany—combined. Yet its population is less than one-tenth that of New York City. Keep that in mind the next time you hear some environmentalist hysteria about the danger of “spoiling” Alaska by drilling for oil in an area smaller than Dulles Airport.

Of all ignorance, the ignorance of the educated is the most dangerous. Not only are educated people likely to have more influence, they are the last people to suspect that they don’t know what they are talking about when they go outside their narrow fields.

One of the many problems with envy is that you have no real way of knowing that someone is more fortunate than you until you are both at the end of your lives—and then it is too late to matter.

Bad credit affects many things, including your chances of getting a job that requires responsibility. On the other hand, if your credit is too good, you get inundated with junk mail.

The harm that divorce does to children is not limited to the children of parents who get divorced. Children whose parents never divorce nevertheless see their friends’ and classmates’ parents getting divorced and have something to worry about whenever their own parents have a disagreement.

People used to say, “Ignorance is no excuse.” Today, ignorance is no problem. Our schools promote so much

self-esteem that people confidently spout off about all sorts of things that they know nothing about.

I am so old that I can remember when other people's achievements were considered to be an inspiration, rather than a grievance.

Imagine that a genie magically appeared and offered to grant you one wish—and, being a decent sort, you wished that everyone's income would be doubled. That could bring down on you the wrath of the political left, because it would mean that the gap between the rich and the poor had widened. That is basically their complaint against the American economy.

What "multiculturalism" boils down to is that you can praise any culture in the world except Western culture—and you cannot blame any culture in the world except Western culture.

One of the sure signs of full employment is bad service.

You know you have a lot of junk when there is not enough room to park one car in a three-car garage.

Some bad policies are just good policies that have been carried too far.

It always seems to come as a big surprise to the media when the stock market goes up and down—even though stocks have been going up and down for centuries.

If you have a right to respect, that means other people don't have a right to their own opinions.

Liberals seem to believe that blacks should be represented



proportionally everywhere—except in conservative organizations.

If there is anything worse than outliving your money, it is outliving all your loved ones.

Considering that we all enter the world the same way and leave in the same condition, we spend an awful lot of time in between trying to show that we are so different from other people.

No matter how old I get or how sophisticated I think I have become, I still find it hard to deal with betrayal.

What are bond issues on the ballot except taxes on future taxpayers who cannot vote yet? It is taxation without representation.

The spectacular success of some people with no college degree, such as Bill Gates and Rush Limbaugh, may give college education a bad name—justifiably, in many cases.

Every time you watch Congress on C-SPAN, you are seeing millions of dollars worth of free advertising for incumbents, while those same incumbents vote restrictions on their potential rivals' ability to raise money to pay for advertising, using the pretty phrase "campaign finance reform."

The first time I flew into London, I was stirred by the thought that, in these skies during World War II, a thousand men of the Royal Air Force saved Western civilization. Today, I wonder how many of our young people have any idea what that was all about, given how little time our schools devote to history, except as a source of grievances, whining, and excuses.

The phrase “glass ceiling” is an insult to our intelligence. What does glass mean, except that we cannot see it? In other words, in the absence of evidence, we are expected to go along with what is said because it is said in accusatory and self-righteous tones and we will be denounced if we don't accept it.

A careful definition of words would destroy half the agenda of the political left and scrutinizing evidence would destroy the other half.

Can one person make a difference? I hate to think where we would be if James Q. Wilson had not written about crime or if Milton Friedman had not written about markets, much less where we would be if Winston Churchill had not been prime minister when Britain faced seemingly hopeless odds against the Nazis.

How anyone can argue in favor of being non-judgmental is beyond me. To say that being non-judgmental is better than being judgmental is itself a judgment, and therefore a violation of the principle.

As a rule of thumb, Congressional legislation that is bipartisan is usually twice as bad as legislation that is partisan.

At one time, I could tear a Washington phone book in half. Not only was I a lot younger, the Washington phone book was a lot smaller.

How many other species' members kill each other to the same extent as human beings?

Time and again, over the centuries, price controls have

produced three things: shortages, quality deterioration and black markets. Why would anyone want any of those things with pharmaceutical drugs?

Don't you get tired of seeing so many "non-conformists" with the same non-conformist look?

Everyone is presumed to be innocent until proven guilty—in a court of law. But we cannot just mindlessly repeat words outside the context in which they apply. If you discovered that your spouse had been secretly checking into motels with someone else, would you presume innocence until proven guilty?

Automobiles are getting to look so much alike that it is hard to tell some cars apart, even when they are made by different manufacturers or even made in different countries. Recently, I was embarrassed to realize that I was trying to get into someone else's German-made car on a parking lot, thinking it was my own Japanese-made car.

Nolan Ryan's baseball career was so long that he struck out seven guys whose fathers he had also struck out. (Barry Bonds and Bobby Bonds, for example.)

Why do some people use a fancy mathematical term like "parameters" when all that they really mean is boundaries?

Flattery makes the most effective chains. Hitler told the Germans that they were a master race—and came very close to making them slaves.

One of the dumbest things you can do is have taxpayers supporting idle adolescents who have nothing but time on

their hands to get into trouble. The money it costs is the least of the problems.

Neither the depth of despondency nor the height of euphoria tells you how long either will last.

Sign on a monument to people who served in the military:  
“All gave some. Some gave all.”