

Vultures, Twinkies, and the Way of Nature

Written by Alex Baer

Saturday, 23 November 2013 20:54 - Last Updated Saturday, 23 November 2013 21:30

It's possible to chew on things longer than is good for you. At some point, those bones of contention getting all that Gnawing Attention start redirecting activity back upon the chewer. It's been that way, and for some time now, on Twinkies.

The way I've been worrying around Twinkies in the back of my mind for the last 12 months, you'd think it was some sort of national emergency or imperative that I'd somehow, inexplicably, been put in charge of. Although I'm not in charge of anything much these days, I have to say in the same breath that I'm not sure that this isn't some sort of national emergency at that.

This mental hand-wringing may only appear to be about Twinkies, but it's also about vultures (human and bird), and about Nature -- the ways of our cutthroat economic system, the nature and expression of human greed, and the nature of a general failure by the public to Pay Attention to Facts and Warning Signs.

If you felt a burst of psychic energy and clairvoyance, you could also add in there my being preoccupied something fierce about An Ongoing Desire to Act Against Our Own Best Interests as Individuals, and you wouldn't be wrong.

See, the system is rigged, and I've been trying to come up with a way to un-rig it. But, like punch-drunk prizefighters who have been hammered and blasted for too many rounds without a break, we're on the ropes, all of us, gasping, while the referees are on their mobiles, Twittering, Tweeting, Facebooking, FacePlanting, following each other around and around, in tighter and more incestuous circles, stalkers and stalkees...

Just a little too distracted by toys and pop culture, I'd have to say we've become, to have any headspace left to notice the earthward plummeting of The American Dream: *Hey! It's on fire, and it's been dropping from a great height for decades!*

You can argue the descent started in the '60s, then got a rude voodoo shove from Reagan, and a final steroidal boot in the butt under Junior's and Cheney's BushCo Enterprises.

That long, slow decline of our country, and some semblance of communal sanity since the late '50s, hasn't been a one- or two-degree dip in the flight plan since way before the boom-and-bust

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bubbles of the '80s and '90s. It's been on a *shriekingly* stark dive slope with a trajectory augering straight into the ground.

OK -- *hang on a second*.

[Dunks head into galvanized tin tub of ice water.]

Wooo!

Now that I'm not overheating in the brain-pan, allow me to start again:

Hostess and Twinkies are back in business, and everyone's just plain thrilled -- *thrilled, I tell you* -- to be making fast food again for us slow thinkers. Yup, it's a real victory, all right. But, for whom?

So far, it's a victory for The Looters over The Looted. (You now have three seconds to determine, based on the rise or fall of your income path under BushCo and beyond, in which of those two camps your tattered tent -- or your gleaming crystal palace -- is parked.)

The Looters (aka One Percenters) have access to unfathomable piles of money, which happily buys them access to lobbyists -- who, in turn, pivot and turn political representatives in the direction of travel most beneficial for The Looters, via changes in tax laws.

The direction of travel, for some time now, has not been toward areas of The Common Good, such as upkeep of infrastructure, increases in access to basic human services, reductions in wars of corporate contrivance and convenience, and advances in policies in which all might share in that mythic American Dream.

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The direction of travel has been from the public's pockets -- from the *Pickpocketed* to the *Pickpocketers*

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Looping back on those hapless Twinkies: Thanks to bankruptcy laws and as host of other specialized financial and tax laws, the Hostess corporation was allowed to be legally plunged into debt by its corporate officers, its workers squeezed, a union dessicated, and the company's previously accumulated riches and bounty liquidated, and right into the hands of those same corporate officers, via bonuses, fat checks, and a wide array of golden-and-platinum parachutes.

The workers, of course -- whose sweat equity helped build the riches of that company -- were simply booted from the aircraft, in motion, and at altitude.

And this is where the Vultures come into clear view. Again. And, if you cared to look, this is where the hijacking of another company pension fund can be seen -- right before that fat pie is divvied up among the corporately blessed for their gluttonous gorging and gouging.

This method of blatant thievery is completely legal. In fact, the laws on the books not only support such activities, they seem to be in complete favor of such practices. The Law all but prints up little banner flags, team jerseys, and free tickets for its few, select players.

The Law doesn't have much to say about a busted union strike, cleverly forced by corporate offices by publicly demanding cuts in pay and benefits for overly stretched workers -- while the corporate officers privately orchestrated their own beneficial gutting, looting, and pocketing of the company.

The blame for demise of the company was, of course, placed squarely on the shoulders of the

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striking workers, as one last departing insult for them to bear, along with the heist of their pension funds.

Like I say: All this was perfectly legal, and as finely-engineered a cleaving away of resources by a small, select group of participants as any precisely-crafted, clockwork-timed bank heist that Hollywood could ever dream up.

It's not only legal, it's positively adored by the masses -- the very same masses left bleeding in the gutters by this cutthroat system that encourages, applauds, and rewards bold thieves.

Please: □ Don't tell me you've already forgotten about the likes of the Mitt Romneys and Bain Capitals of the world -- the finest examples of Vulture Capitalism that can be found in this land, from one shining, pickpocketed sea to the other tarnished, bankrupted sea.

Talk about popular! Almost half the country voted for a ticket topped by a Vulture Capitalist. (The other guy only wanted to come up with a way to provide many Americans with affordable health care. How a no-brainer turned into a neck-and-neck race is a horse of a different travesty, of course.)

And, naturally, to help take the sting away from bash to the braincells of that move, of a Vulture Capitalist as potential Fearless Leader, the ticket was balanced out by adding salt mines to our bleeding, national head wound by slipping in a Denier of Facts and High Priest of Superstition and Stupidity.

Talk about a one-two punch as far as votes of confidence are concerned! Half the country went nuts for it -- literally and figuratively. Yes, well... These were votes of confidence. For confidence men. Voted by the very same people being conned.

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Vultures have a place in nature. When not providing semi-scary moments in cartoons and western movies, they provide fully-scary moments in real life. However, unlike the real vultures who police up carrion and help keep down pockets of disease eruptions, Vulture Capitalist are themselves eruptions of disease -- Greed.

Actual vultures are far more mild-mannered than their human economic counterpart. Actual vultures, for example, do not themselves kill off the subjects of their feasts; they have the decency, and the good manners, to wait for life to expire before pulling up a chair to the table and tucking in their napkins.

No so, Vulture Capitalists, who have a wholly different notion of what a Hot Lunch Program should be. Vulture Capitalists can be counted on to impatiently kill their victims, then whip out a *Let's Eat!* bib, right at the spot of execution.

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Going Whole Hog: Americans do things on a large scale. No longer content to be a retail outlet for *Yes, And May I Have Another?*, Americans scurried around, hurriedly opening up distributorships, going whole-heartedly, and fully wholesale, into that line.

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A fan or Irony speaks: In a cascading series of mirror-views within mirror-views, my being a fan or Irony might actually be ironic, given the current situations. But, I remain a fan nonetheless, whatever price it asks me to pay, and I sing its praises where and when I can.

That's because Irony tries to make you laugh a little bit, and put you in a relaxed, happy frame of mind, just before it takes the brass knuckles to your temple and gut. Irony's not being cruel, here, it's just trying to get your attention long enough to help you learn something.

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Since Life does the *brass-knucks* trick on a regular basis anyway, it's nice to have that small peck on the cheek of laughter before the iron fist in the velvet glove finds that cheek, or the other cheek, no matter how far it's been turned.

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Matter of Time: You know, somehow, I wouldn't be surprised if I were to come across a news report or statistic that said something like, "The production of big, foam 'We're Number One!' hands in the United States has plummeted for the 18th consecutive year, now making the U.S. number 139th overall in the production of big, foam hands."

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Location, Location, Location: Down the street a way, in my small town, is a vast mill complex. Like many other vast mill complexes all over the country, it is being torn down by hydraulic dinosaurs that nip and rip at its metal structures, footing, and framing, bringing them down before fossil-fueled carnivores. The metal they chew up and spit out will make the transition from Useful Manufacturing Base to Idle Scrap Waiting for the Highest Bidder, If Any.

It's the same journey that many workers are making, myself included.

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More Irony for the diet: There are pick-up trucks aplenty in my town. Some are normal sized. Others insist on tires that force entry at the second-floor level. They gather periodically, solo and in small, unintentional clusters, to gaze through the cyclone fencing and past the *Danger No Trespassing* signs, to watch the hydraulic dinosaurs take down prey and graze.

Buildings that once added true wealth to this nation, and to its workers, and to the town, are

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being torn apart and torn down, while members of the current Consumption Economy watch on, drinking coffee from their Thermoses, eating sandwiches from battered metal lunchboxes that once went through those same gates to work.

These lunchboxes and Thermoses are now being used in the cabs of pick-up trucks, at various heights off the ground; all the occupant-users are flat on their backs in the dirt.

The level playing field referred to so often, usually by people not restricted to playing there, is littered with the bodies of ball carriers and others who played there, and who once upon a time, believed in the mythos of working hard, and sharing in a singularly American Dream.

Many of these people haven't been allowed to play on that level playing field in a very long time. Inexplicably, they ignore the reasons for their being sidelined, and vigorously wave faded, battered, big foam hands.

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A final, fatal sting of Irony: All of those pick-up trucks -- every last one of them -- still has fading Romney-Ryan bumper stickers proudly displayed on their rusted bumpers and cracked rear-window glass.

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Ding Dongs At the Helm - The Story of Sno-Balling Mayhem: Maybe Hostess will someday share with us how they came up with names like Zingers and Ho-Hos, lighthearted and smiling appellations, while, all the time, concealing their supposedly innocent, pro-good-clean-fun image by cooking up kettles of batwings and eyes-of-newt in their executive officer meetings. And here we all are, gunned down in our prime, by Twinkie the Kid.

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Flinching from memory, and from practice: I remember where I was when John Kennedy was assassinated, and then Bobby. And Martin Luther King, Jr. And where I was when people claimed our moon for their home planet. And when the space shuttle exploded, leaving behind only a terrible, forking rip in the sky. I remember where I was when the planes hit the Towers. And when our Supreme Court dissolved Democracy. And when we decided to war on a country whose stores of oil overpowered our weakening sense of guilt at grabbing it outright as if it were our birthright.

I remember where I was when corporations were promoted from unfeeling pieces of paper to sentient beings, to people. I remember Exxon and BP fouling oceans, and oceans of lives, and being tapped on the hand with a feather of penalty. I remember the battle of our atmosphere and climate, of unproven superstition and belief overpowering and overwhelming logic and provable fact.

I remember where I have been, watching these corporations, as newly-promoted *people*, thieving their way to unstoppable successes, unimpeded by laws, unrestricted by servants, never arrested, always left free to roam, pillage, devour.

The real pain, the kind that never goes away, comes from remembering too much, from being too clear-headed, from knowing that none of these things used to be the norm.

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Back in the land o' Twinkies: Piles of money having been yet again re-arranged to favor the re-arrangers, snack cakes are being nurtured along again down assembly lines in a few plants. Towns having their zombie plants brought back to life are more like partially-recovered stroke victims than miracle stories.

Where a thousand bakers once worked, a victory is declared when five hundred can now punch a clock. How times change -- and how times change what we'll call a victory.

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I am not sure how many such *victories* our nation can actually stand, and still stand.

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I hear things are pretty good for Vultures these days. Plenty of new Idle Scrap is created every day. And, as far as I know, things aren't slowing down any in the hydraulic dinosaur business, either.

> Sigh <

Previously seen story (and report links) in this now-and-again column: <http://tvnewslies.org/tvn/index.php/editorial/alex-baer/26194-ask-not-for-whom-the-ding-dong-tolls.html>

And, an appetizer of an update:

<http://www.npr.org/blogs/thesalt/2013/05/27/186452060/Twinkies-Return-Is-Mostly-Sweet-New-s-For-Kansas-Town>

Waxing factually: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Twinkie>

Bonus Dessert Link: <http://grist.org/list/this-is-what-a-37-year-old-twinkie-looks-like/>