

The Last Word™

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Is America still the land of the free?

As America celebrates its 250th birthday, we have to ask ourselves if it's still the land of the free.

We fear no.

Recently, it occurred to me that most of my best memories of my youth and young adulthood—i.e., before the age of 22—are of things that would be illegal now or at some other point in the 2020s. These activities have rarely been outlawed for any defensible reason. You can reasonably argue that there should be some *rules* placed on some activities I indulged in—for example, to help conserve the environment—but our detractors have refused to follow similar rules. The greater point though is that so many of our best experiences are now *completely* illegal—and shouldn't be.

How bad have things gotten? The type of teenage gatherings that existed in my day would now be banned because youth curfews are so much stricter now. The expansion of curfews isn't for any good reason, as it punishes the innocent. It even violates court decisions like *Betancourt v. West New York* and a 1995 federal ruling in a San Diego case. Yet curfews only expand and never lessen.

For older teenagers to go to venues like shopping malls or movie theaters alone or with peers is now often verboten as many of these places now ban teens who are not accompanied by an adult. This is quite hypocritical. These places advertise their products to young people, but they don't appreciate their business enough to treat them the way paying customers should be treated.

It appears as if Ohio has passed a law against eating on school buses, because food scraps were left laying around on a bus. But there's an exception that says it's allowed if supervised by a chaperone.

In my day, a person could light a firecracker on the Fourth of July without getting a ticket. If relatives ever traveled by air—which admittedly was rare for most of my family—we were allowed to meet them right at the gate. I'm lucky I never had a backyard satellite dish, because it appears that laws on receiving remote TV signals are also stricter now than before.

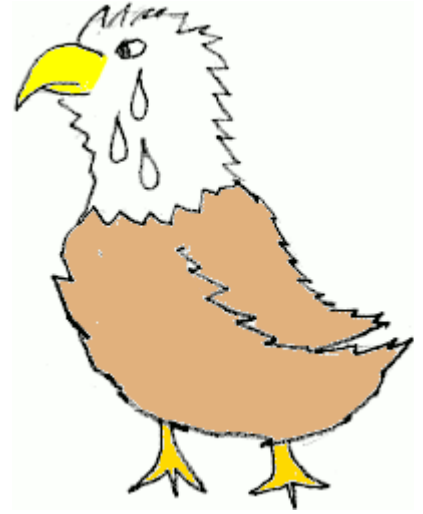
There are reports that some jurisdictions bar anyone under 18 from buying snacks in grocery and convenience stores. Some communities ban young people from buying markers.

Some of my best memories involve gathering on the lawn in college. But in the early 2020s, colleges warred against students "clustering" and prohibited such shocking activity. These weren't only school rules, as they seemed to fall under executive fiats by governors and mayors. In addition, even public colleges started to control students' off-campus behavior that had no connection whatsoever to school. This was almost unheard of in public educational institutions 30 years ago.

If laws in my time were like the laws today, I likely wouldn't be allowed to access the computer bulletin boards I used as a teenager—no matter how G-rated the content was. That's because new laws are being passed that impose age restrictions. Even if I could access these BBS's, I probably wouldn't be allowed to download many of the programs that I did, because the Digital Millennium Copyright Act now criminalizes programs that do not even violate copyright law. The rationale for this prohibition is that they theoretically *might* be used to violate it. Despite this, AI models have gotten away with violating copyrights by scraping other websites.

Growing up on the edge of an urban area, it was generally recognized that we had freedom to roam in nearby woods. Now that's illegal. I recently read that festivals have begun banning Chap Stick, using the excuse that people might use Chap Stick to smuggle in drugs. Such a ban would have been unthinkable in my day.

On Wednesdays during my senior year of high school, I took a TANK bus home from school and hung around in downtown Cincinnati. I was 18—and therefore an adult—but I wouldn't dare expect that to be tolerated from 18-year-olds today.



The examples provided in this article represent some of the fondest memories of my early life. And they're effectively against the law now, or have been in this decade. Let that sink in. Most of my favorite activities in my youth are now *illegal*. Some of this is because of illogical age requirements that weren't enacted yet in my day, but most of these activities are now banned at *any* age.

I'm not a doctrinaire libertarian, but even doctrinaire libertarianism beats the suffocating bipartisan statism we see today. Our political "leaders" have fallen harum-scarum into the sewer of authoritarianism. Civil liberties that were once considered unassailable are simply not in their lexicon – even if they appear to take better stances on other matters. (Don't trust them on those things either, because they're usually just raising money off of it.) As a result of this public policy massacre, today's young people have had their most important years stolen from them.

In addition, the hoops that even adults have to jump through today to get a bank account or utility service are mind-blowing. Whenever you want to do anything of consequence now, you practically need an entire Trapper Keeper full of paperwork. Yet data centers are approved just for the asking.

It's un-American, and much of it has been carried out by people who hate freedom. Yet it rules the roost on America's 250th birthday. What a disgrace.

Saturday night's alright for fighting Wikipedia

If you have any lofty plans to edit Wikipedia, you might want to think again.

It turns out that almost everybody who has T-Mobile for Internet has been blocked from editing Wikipedia. If you try to make an edit, you will be confronted by the words, "This IP address range has been globally blocked." All of T-Mobile is blocked because *one* user offended someone.

Uh, we thought everyone had unique IP numbers now? At least that's what people are told when somebody with the same ISP does something that makes someone mad, and an innocent person suffers the consequences because they log on and end up with the same IP number that the offender had when they did whatever they did. The argument changes to suit the purpose at hand. If IP numbers were unique, Wikipedia wouldn't need to block a whole provider.

Fact is, people don't have unique IP numbers. But Wikipedia's stance is still bullshit.

The block of T-Mobile does not expire until next April.

Who at Wikipedia blocked T-Mobile—and why? It was blocked by someone using the handle Elton (like Elton John). The most we can gather is that it was blocked "due to abuse from this IP range."

This reminds me of the insurance commercials that talked about "minimum coverage." *What abuse?* If there really was abuse, the details need to be provided. You can't just say there was something that falls under the nebulous rubric of abuse.

Elton is a so-called "steward" on Wikipedia, but about all he ever does is block IP's. He's been doing it for years. In addition, when someone complained about a specific IP being blocked, Rocket Man blamed server problems.

Wikipedia has placed blanket blocks on T-Mobile before, going back at least a few years. It's almost as bad as the old fights about UDP's and the Cabal (TISAC). And, back in 2007, we reported on a series of blocks lasting 3 years that afflicted independent dialup ISP's that went through PacWest. The first block was issued by some reactionary weirdo who apparently held the classist view that users of new high-speed providers made edits that were of better quality than users of dialup ISP's. We were supposed to be able to get around these blocks by creating an account, but the blocks prevented us from creating one. We couldn't use a proxy server either. Wikipedia had banned proxy servers so readers in China couldn't evade the Chinese government's censorship of their site. By blocking proxies, Wikipedia was effectively allowing itself to be censored. Wikipedia told people who couldn't create an account, "Please create an account to avoid this issue." People were told to create an account just to be able to...create an account.



There's still 9 months left on the current block of T-Mobile. You can bet your bizcream that some self-styled "steward" like Elton imposes a new block as soon as this one expires.

Some Wikipedia entries also spread disinformation. In light of this and the ongoing blocks, the government should take a hard look at revoking Wikipedia's tax-exempt status. Wikipedia has become an elite propaganda organ influenced by debunked media talking points and by the CIA and other intelligence bodies around the world.

Weddings got ru

Weddings got ru! Weddings got ru! Nerrrr nerrr nerrr nerrrr! Wurma lurma lurmp lurmp, wurma lurma lurmp lurmp!

Special moments in life getting ruined fits with the theme of shock that we often rely on. Take graduations, for instance. Yet I didn't have to worry about my high school graduation getting ruined, because I chose not to attend, as it wasn't mandatory. I figured I just wouldn't get anything out of it. A better example might be weddings. I've put a damper on several. At one wedding, each guest got a slice of cake, and I almost ate one of the small plastic birds on the cake because it blended in with the icing. I chewed it for several minutes before I realized what it was. At another wedding, the food was so disgusting that I spit it into a urinal. And one time, I went to New Orleans for New Year's, and I tripped in an alley and spoke some choice words. This was right during the most important moment of a wedding that was taking place in the alley.

Now the public Internet has yielded piles of stories of weddings getting ruined. A member of a band that played at a wedding said everyone left just as they took the stage. It turned out that there was a huge fight involving numerous guests, and almost everyone was either arrested or injured. The only guest who stayed was a drunken uncle who kept dancing by himself. One person said they went to a wedding reception where an aunt kept gossiping about everybody—and the wedding video picked it up. Another person said the bride's dad was 45 minutes late to walk her down the aisle. Plus, it was on a 100-degree day, and the air conditioning broke. In addition, the refrigerators gave out, and the food for the reception spoiled. Even the wedding planner was crying!

At another wedding, the maid of honor gave a drunken speech in which—among other things—she talked about how the groom liked prostitutes. The maid of honor ended up being dragged away. One person said that when they were growing up, they went on a family camping trip and brang along their dog. The dog got loose, found a wedding, ran up to the buffet table, smashed it, and ate all the food. One commenter said their aunt was getting married, and made her folks pay for a gigantic wedding with hundreds of guests at a fancy hotel. But the groom failed to show up at all. None of his family showed up either. Yet the reception went on anyway, and the commenter got drunk, fell down some stairs, and spilled wine all over the floor.

At yet another wedding, a man got drunk and started a mashed potato fight. One commenter



saw her entire wedding weekend destroyed. The groom's sister didn't show up to meet the bridal party like she was supposed to—then “whined and cried” because they went to the venue without her. The groom's brother acted like an idiot throughout the reception. For no apparent reason, he grabbed a cupcake and smashed it in the groom's face. He also cussed out the commenter's mom. At one wedding, the photographer ran away with all the gifts. The police wouldn't do anything about it, despite evidence from surveillance cameras.

One person said a wedding was decimated during the most romantic part of the ceremony when the groom's dad tried to take a photo and the priest threw a tantrum. The grim clergyman slammed down his Bible and yelled at the man in front of everybody. After the event, the priest bragged that he was just keeping his flock in line. One reception was destroyed when the groom's young son was found crushing up candy and snorting it. A half-hour later, the police showed up and busted the groom for cocaine. Another reception went awry at the hands of a group of college rugby players who were having a party in the ballroom next door. The fire alarm went off when the athletes set tables on fire. The building was evacuated, and the rugby players kept throwing drinking glasses at the wedding guests. Then they attacked the bride's mom and poured water all over the food for the reception.

One woman described her disastrous wedding in detail. Her mom did the planning and booked reservations in Las Vegas. The bride had young stepsiblings, and their mom threatened to charge their dad with kidnapping if he took them to the wedding—unless he paid her an extra \$1,500 in child support. When the bride and her fiancé got to their hotel, the inn illegally refused to check them in, as they were under 25. The bride had made a hair appointment, but when she got to the salon, she was told there was no appointment. She had to do her own hair, and she cut her hand while doing so, leaving a permanent scar. Her purse got stolen with her ID and money in it. Her dad went dumpster diving in his Marine Corps dress uniform in a failed attempt to find it. When the couple got to the chapel, they found that the info on their wedding they had already paid for had been lost. The photographer was drunk, and he only spoke German. The bride's mom told everyone the wrong time for the wedding, so guests showed up 45 minutes late. The stepsiblings kept kicking each other and screaming throughout the ceremony. The couple wanted to change the words “love, honor, and obey” to “love, honor, and cherish”, but the chaplain became enraged. The restaurant for the reception dinner lost the reservation. The wedding cake that was ordered didn't show up. After the reception, the family returned to the parents' hotel room, and got a call that the cake was finally located. The baker had delivered it to the hotel's room service kitchen instead of the restaurant. When the groom was doing the cake shoving bit, he accidentally yanked out one of the bride's earrings and almost tore her earlobe open. The stepsibs kept jumping on the bed in the hotel room and throwing cake around. After the bride toasted with champagne, her uncle “threw a fit” and “sulked for the rest of the night” because the bride wasn't 21 yet. The air conditioner in the hotel wouldn't shut off, and the hotel had no maintenance crew to fix it, so the rooms got too cold. Then the uncle whined because the couple “started the honeymoon fast” while family was at the same hotel. The next day, the couple got a different hotel, but the inn had lost the reservation. The hotel compensated by giving them tickets to a concert there, but apparently, the concert was only for 21 and older.

A commenter said their mother-in-law got drunk at a family wedding, heckled the couple during their reception speeches, and passed out. A bride said her wedding was ruined by a woman that the groom's family knew who showed up. This woman got drunk, and she told the bride during the reception that she couldn't believe the groom didn't marry someone she thought was better. Then this woman somehow smashed the cake. The bride tried to kick her out, but the groom wouldn't agree. His stubborn defense of the unruly behavior ruined the whole first week of the couple's marriage.

One person said that when they were a teenager, they were assigned to take a video of their uncle's wedding. But this was 30 years ago—before video cameras could be turned sideways so the image could be bigger from top to bottom. So the entire video was tilted at a 90-degree angle. My memory of this is foggy, but I seem to remember a case on *The People's Court* in which a couple hired a videographer for their wedding, but the sound wasn't recorded, so the videographer used a Mickey



Mouse voice to do the voices for the couple and the clergyman.

A woman said she was planning a small beach wedding with only a few close relatives. But her soon-to-be mother-in-law called her with a huge list of people she had invited—some of whom were complete strangers. This caused the couple to cancel the wedding and reschedule it in Fiji. So the mother-in-law had to uninvite all her guests and pay to fly to Fiji. One big wedding was pretty much ended when a relative of the bride went to each table and revealed that the bride was sleeping with her husband. Similarly, a wedding photographer reported that they worked at a wedding that came to a screeching halt when it came time for the toast. That's when the bride calmly told the crowd, "I overheard my sister talking to my husband in the bathroom about how they're sleeping with each other." Then she told everyone to just go home. In another instance, the bride cheated on her fiancé the day before the wedding, and the wedding was canceled—causing the couple to lose \$10,000.

There's 700 more pages of these stories saved up, so bunker down!

Bush to cut income taxes for all, except that he didn't (a blast from the past)

We're trying very hard to get life straightened out after the abuse in our schools. It didn't have to be this way, but here we are.

As part of this process, we're cleaning out old papers from our closet. One of them is an article that ran in the *Cincinnati Post* in 1999. This was even before the 2000 "election", and the *Post* was already absolutely over the moon with George W. Bush. The headline reads, "Bush to cut income taxes for all." Reading the actual AP article though, we see that the headline was a load of bull. Some Americans were already making too little money to have to pay income tax. Even aside from that, Bush's plan would have cut income taxes more for the rich than for the less opulent. And it would have altogether eliminated estate taxes—which were paid mostly by the rich.

Oh, and most of Bush's actions went on to be even worse than what he proposed. Imagine that!

Even his stimulus checks only went to those who made enough money to have to pay income tax. Retirees, low-income workers, and the disabled got nothing. The Bush dictatorship essentially neutralized the idea of a progressive tax structure. It was a dominionist dream.

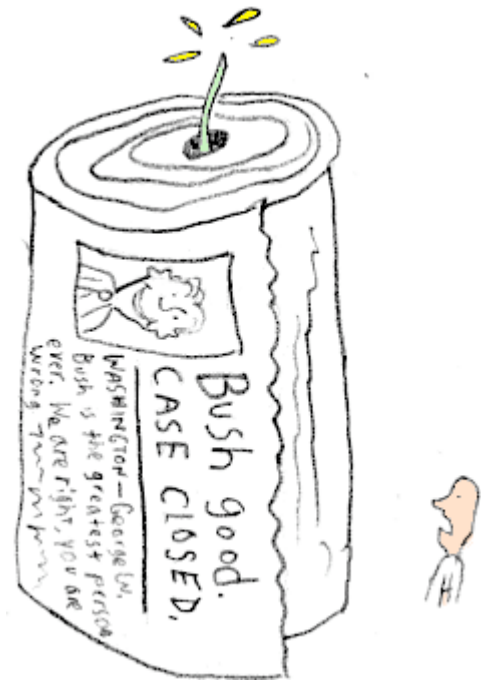
But it's pretty bad that half of our serious articles aren't just about a policy but the media's biased coverage of it. It's so meta!

However, policy disasters were bipartisan even back then. This is shown by another instance of media sleight of hand in these old papers. We found an article about how the percentage of high school students with straight A's had grown from 28 to 37, and average SAT scores improved as well. But instead of hailing it as a good thing, the piece stovepiped an unsupported claim by Bill Clinton's Education Secretary Richard Riley, who said it was proof of "grade inflation." That's like if you graduate from high school, but instead of throwing a party, everyone accuses you of cheating and provides no evidence. Though the piece echoed debunked right-wing complaints like the above, it also leapfrogged to ridiculous wokewashing—over 20 years before it was in vogue.

Also, when we were sorting these papers, we noticed that good news was already so rare then that if there was a positive story we wanted to use, we had gone through the trouble of drawing a smiley face on it (like when someone in 8th grade drew a smiley face on a photo in a newspaper of John Franco bubbling). In addition, we found a bank statement from Star Bank from 1996 that had its "Bank Without Boundaries" slogan—perhaps the most terrifying corporate tagline in history. Star Bank's radio commercials that used this slogan were even scarier than seeing it in print, as it was always chanted like the mid-1990s Magna Doodle ad.

Another amusing thing I found was a copy of a rough draft for a report on a short story I had to do in college. I had written on it, "rough draft (rough as toilet paper)."

Your fight-or-flight response is controlled by a small part of the brain called the amygdala. The problem I have is that my fight-or-flight response has been stuck in the open position for 40 years. It doesn't have an on-and-off switch, so I can't turn it on or off at will. Think of politicians whose mouths



are stuck open. That's what my fight-or-flight response is like. Professionals can help periodically stabilize this response, but I can't just shut it off completely. Even during positive experiences – which are now rare – this response stays activated. When I wake up each day, it takes hours just to get situated. Yet this condition may have one and only one advantage: I know how to identify certain news events that could become a problem. So I report on stories that few others do.

This isn't a skill that lends itself to economic advancement, since our rulers aren't willing to pay enough for this service. After all, they're the ones being exposed. But you can't say we didn't try.



I finally found my ACT scores

I thought my ACT scores were lost for good, and that if I wanted to go back to college at 53, I'd have to take the ACT again. But—by some miracle—they've just suddenly reappeared during my summer cleaning.

The scores are on my college transcript I got during my outside agitator phase at NKU (around the time people stuck bubble gum on a Jewel poster and tried to frame me for using the computers in the Steely Dan Library to call someone a poopyhead on the Internet). Near the top of the first page, the transcript admonishes, "The student's academic records are on HOLD," because of course they are. Anyway, the first page has my "enhanced" ACT scores. I don't know how an "enhanced" ACT is different from a regular ACT, but at least now I know my scores.

My composite ACT score is 5 out of 5. Just joking! Actually, it's 24.

I don't know if that's good or bad. I'm not bragging, because a 24 might be bad. Actually, if it is bad, it's bragging, since I go by the Bart Simpson principle: "Underachiever and proud of it, man!"

But in the category of "rhetorical skills" – whatever that is – I only got a 13. So have a good cry.

How much do you want to bet that "rhetorical skills" counted for more of the composite than math did? This speaks to something that's stuck in my craw for a long time. Schools have long had a bias against students who do better at math and informational texts. Schools instead favor pupils who perform better at identifying literary elements such as a story's theme. What's worse is that the media has long claimed that the exact opposite is true, which encourages schools to double down on their existing bias. Thus, the former group doesn't go as far in school, and gets shut out of fields like journalism. The result is that there aren't as many investigative reporters.

For a long time, schools' bias has aggravated the living bejeebers out of me. People who process science, facts, and details so they can forestall bullshit are shut out, as schools focus on abstract form instead. Our educational needs have been increasingly ignored for decades. This bias is reflected even in scores on standardized tests. I wasn't even offered math when I was a high school junior. Informational texts weren't much more of a priority than math was, and the school even canceled a unit on current events, because it "caused problems." Math and informational texts endow us with critical thinking skills, which are a must for investigative journalism.

In a world of Brit Humes, be a Steve Kroft (bubbling optional).



See you in the toilet!

Forget Holiday Inn Conquering. There, we forgot it already. The once-dominant Holiday Inn hotel chain was a victim of its own success. By the 1990s, the hotel biz had splintered into more specialized options.

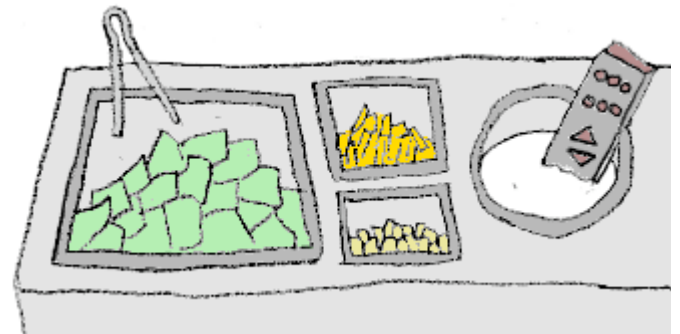
One of them was Super 8. I stayed at a Super 8 in Georgia in 1991, and it offered smelly rooms and slimy toilets. This hampered the Super 8 brand. It was years before I stayed at another Super 8. But I tried to revive my old Holiday Inn Conquering game by instituting Super 8 Conquering in its place. To pass the rainy days, I started to go through the Super 8 directory and pretend I was “conquering” each hotel – in the order they were listed.

That means I started with the Super 8 in Alexander City, Alabama. This was all fantasy. None of it was real. You put the directory away, and it was gone. According to an old document I recently found, I “conquered” this inn by putting the TV in the toilet. I flooded the hotel by puncturing the waterbed. I threw the TV remote control into the salad dressing at a nearby Shoney’s. I threw a Ronald McDonald statue from McDonald’s into a lake.

I cast a curse on the innkeeper that made his nose grow one inch per day until it was 5 feet long. I also summoned a swarm of bees to attack him.

Again, none of that was real. *It didn't actually happen!* Once the directory had been stowed safely out of sight, the game was done until I got it out again, danced around in a circle, and sang, “Directory! Directory!”

That’s the only entry on that paper. I stopped after the first hotel in the book.
Super 8 Conquering wasn't real! Get a grip!



Who? What? When? Where? Why?

The Last Word wants to know why Channel 12 allows racist comments on its YouTube videos (but deletes other comments).

Walking in Memphis

Something funny happened once on a family trip when I was 17.

This was on our fact-finding mission in Memphis. I almost didn't get to go, because the far right had made such a struggle of the entire summer. And when I talk about the far right, I mean the *actual* far right. I'm not throwing the term around willy-nilly like when the media complains about "squatters" or when computer bulletin boards falsely accused people of being "pirates."

Anybip, we got a motel that had an indoor pool. The room with the pool had a sign featuring a huge color photo of the innkeeper's smiling mug. He was a heavily balding, mustachioed man. I'm sure he was a nice guy, but we kept making fun of his photo where he grinned like a moron.

The sign was an obstruction. It kept getting in our way when we were accessing the pool. So we came up with a nickname for the innkeeper pictured on the sign: the Geek.

As we were splashing around in the pool, we kept warning, "Don't get water on the Geek."

But one day, after one of us said something about the Geek, we turned around, and guess who was standing right across the room, only about 30 feet away?

That's right! It was Mr. Geek himself!

But he pretended like he didn't notice us poking fun at him. It was all in good fun, of course. Sort of like a roast.

Apparently, the Geek was more able to take lighthearted humor than Old Stopsignface and the Getty Grouch were. In fact, our encounters with Stopsignface and Getty weren't even designed to make fun of them, yet they were still humorless.



A case for D.C. statehood?

Not long ago, we outlined incompetence in Washington, D.C., city government that stemmed from its choice to soothe gentrification moguls who stampeded into town from rich suburbs. This was a case against giving statehood to D.C. under its current boundaries. The tyranny in the existing 50 states is no excuse for a new state to be just as bad. We suggested that in order for D.C. to become a state, it should have to redraw its boundaries to lessen the authoritarian influence of gentrification.

But here's a counterpoint to that piece. The federal government has often mismanaged D.C. just as badly as the city's own leaders. Under the Contract with America, Congress seized control of most city functions, even though city officials were more competent back then than they are now. Not long after, residents and visitors noticed that huge rats were roaming town, homelessness had ballooned, and parking meters were broken. The city's schools couldn't open on time because work on the roofs wasn't done yet, and the city gained the nation's highest tuberculosis rate. One article blamed city leaders, even as it also noted that congressional hirelings had run the city for 2 years.

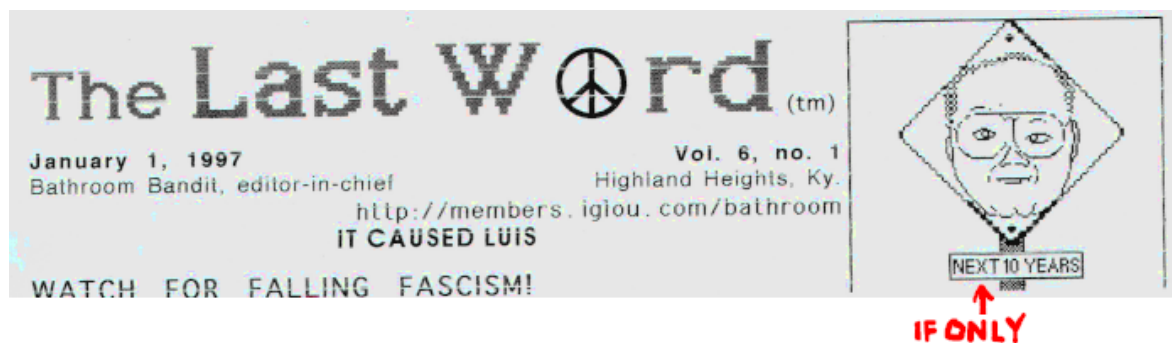
Make no mistake. It was Congress's fault.

Everyone knew how ridiculously incompetent Congress at the time was. It might be even worse now. But we have to admit, it was hard to top that one. The decline of the nation's capital rests entirely at the hands of the Republican "revolutionaries" of the 1990s. Its failure to recover from it isn't their fault, but its initial decline was.

New York City got to be just as bad back then, but it wasn't under congressional control. Yet D.C. didn't get that bad until Congress took it over. If it was bad before, Congress had all that time to fix it—but didn't.

(To this day, there's a neighborhood in New York City that

has no sewer system, so it floods all the time. For decades, the city's excuse for not providing sewers



has been that it's a low-lying area. Yet wealthy beachfront areas that are even lower do of course have sewers.)

The right-wing Congress kept insisting it had a divine right to control all of Washington, D.C.'s affairs, even as Congress showed again and again how incompetent and corrupt it was at dealing with almost any topic you could imagine. Even if it got something right 1% of the time, it was for the wrong reasons. Regarding its mismanagement of D.C., Congress kept saying it was because it didn't have enough power and demanded even more. Their ideas weren't working, yet they wanted to double down. It was like the "mask harder" arguments.

In recent years, bad policies have rarely been reversed. So will things get better in D.C. even as the city's own leaders are allowed to govern? Don't bet on it. But can we trust the current federal regime to do any better? It is to laugh—except it's not funny.

More congressional fascism (a blast from the past)

You hate the Congress of the late 1990s.

But trust us. You don't hate it enough.

Our stash of articles we're cleaning out has yielded a 1997 piece that shows some early rumblings of the housing disaster that's taken place in Newport.

You may know how the Ky. 9 road project was designed primarily to eliminate public housing. Its main purpose wasn't to improve transportation. You may also know that the rest of this housing was torn down to build the Ovation arena and some luxury homes.

The 1997 article says things were already getting under way even then. Back then, the city and developers wanted to replace the public housing with an NBA arena. But what prompted all of this in the first place? A consultant who worked on the plan said of low-income housing, "Congress is making changes. They want to phase it out."

So Newtzi again?

If Wikipedia hadn't blocked almost all of T-Mobile from editing articles until next April all because one person disagreed with an edit someone made, we'd have good cause to change Newt Gingrich's entry to reflect that nickname—and to change Phil Gramm's name to Semenbubble.

Where were public housing residents supposed to go? Away—according to Congress.

There wasn't a single morning when I woke up and said, "Gee, I hope today is the day when everyone who lives in public housing gets kicked out of their home." There were so many things wrong then, yet one of Congress's priorities was whining about the poor having it too easy. That's like how the last decade was marked by the gutting of campaign finance and voting rights laws, so the next 1,000 articles in the *Nation* were about the necessity of lockdowns.

When they weren't moaning about the poor having it too easy, they were crying about the rich and big corporations having it too hard. They didn't care about small business, because any firm that benefited from their ideology was—by definition—not a small business but a big business. They sanctimoniously complained about employees not working during personal time and asking to be paid a fair wage. And they were assholes about it too. You should read some of the things they said.

Before the 104th Reich stole power, things had actually been improving for a rare couple years. Life was so much better then. We had a right—we repeat, a *right*—for things to be like they were, and to not have it forcibly stolen from us, which it was.

One of the bright spots of the 2 years that preceded that national shame was the Family & Medical Leave Act of 1993, which passed amid overwhelming public support. It's hard to believe the Republicans in 1994 actually ran *against* this law and got away with it. It seems statistically impossible for a party to post widespread electoral wins by running against a policy as popular as that law was, unless there was some sort of election interference. Even the best news outlets dropped the ball by failing to run stories that asked what went wrong. Running against the Family & Medical Leave Act was like how major radio stations shunned Artists United Against Apartheid for opposing racism.

The poopy stain of the Contract with America remains on the country's landscape.



Extra flavor for that extra long study hall

Love a good mystery? I bet you do!

Love a good *bubble gum* mystery? I bet you love that even more! After all, any story about bubble gum is automatically funny.

There was a well-known incident when I was a freshman at the hated Bishop Brossart High School that involved bubble gum. It took place in the classroom where we had history and study hall. Here's what I famously recall: A student found a dirty stick of Extra gum behind the heater and chewed it. It was the flavor that was specifically labeled as *bubble gum*—which makes it a zillion times funnier than it otherwise would be.

It was still in its wrapper when he found it—but it was covered with dust, grime, and dead bugs (including some type of mite). It was also slightly melted from being behind the heater. But when he found that stick of gum, he unwrapped it and crammed it into his mouth as fast as his paws could move. I could see that it absolutely made his day. He was like Cookie Monster, only for gum instead of cookies.

I think he found the stick of gum because a group of us pointed it out to him. It is unknown whether he bubbled.

But here's the real mystery. How did the gum get behind the heater? Who put it there? Was it intentional? Did they know it was there?

There are several possible scenarios. It could have fallen out of a pack of 5 sticks. If so, did the owner of this pack notice it and write it off as the cost of doing business? Or did they not notice and think they still had a full pack? Did they plan to bubble with the lost stick? What did they do with the rest of the pack? Did they chew all 4 pieces at once and try to blow the world's biggest bubble? If so, where? If they did it at school, did the teachers catch them?

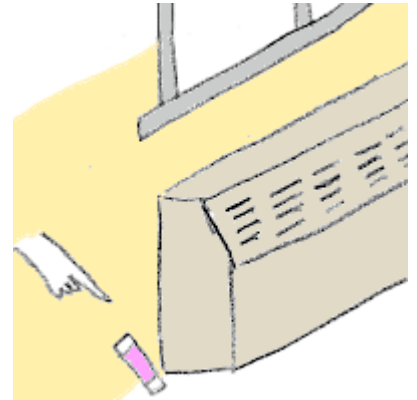
Or did they discard that stick of gum on purpose? And why? Was it so they could get a rise out of everyone when they saw a piece of gum behind the heater? Or did they find some defect on the gum (e.g., a booger) that rendered it unfit for consumption?

Where was the gum acquired from? Tracing the life of this stick of gum can reveal a lot about the world. What became of the gum after it was expended? Was it thrown into a trash receptacle? Or stuck between the pages of a textbook? If it was the latter, what was the teacher's reaction when the book was turned in at the end of the year?

Was anyone skeepee'd at during the life cycle of this stick of gum? School was the most likely place for skeepee, but many dentists also hate gum. If the student who found the gum had a dentist appointment after school and was still chomping this plug of beegee, that may have been one angry dentist! I've seen dental assistants who bubbled—like the Sarah Palin look-alike—but they were employees, not patients.

Hopefully, the student spit out the gum before the dentist started working on his gnashers!

Also, I looked online for Extra wrappers from 1988, and I saw that people are selling unopened 38-year-old packs of this gum on eBay. I also noticed that Extra *bubble gum* was the only kind of Extra whose flavor was underlined on the pack, because its bubble busting capabilities were so important. This pack of stale gum from the Reagan era was selling for \$24. Recent reviews of this brand and flavor, however, say it tastes like Silly String.



Weddings got ru, part 2!

The Ru Crew is seeing double in this ish, as we're running a bonus set of stories we found on the public Internet of weddings getting ruined. You'll bip, you'll bop, you'll beg for more!

One woman posted that her wedding was one disaster after another. Her dress was based on incorrect measurements and didn't fit right. The DJ she hired complained that all the music she requested was "vulgar." Then the DJ played the wrong song during the ceremony. Only one guest

even recorded the ceremony, and the file got corrupted and could never be viewed. During a special brunch the next day, the woman's mom was insulted by her new husband's mom. When the photos came back later, they were found to be touched up beyond recognition. The photographer sniffed, "You probably shouldn't have hired me if you expected it to be different." Somebody replied to that post saying her mom ruined her wedding by getting drunk beforehand, showing up late, and "being obnoxious" during the best man's speech. Somebody else said she hired her uncle as her wedding photographer, but he arrived drunk and mostly just took photos of a groomsman's mustache.

In another thread, a woman described how her wedding was destroyed by a torrential downpour: "My dress was muddy and ruined." The magic word! Everybody's shoes became "unsalvageable." One bride said her dress was ruined just before the wedding when the groom's pal got drunk and spilled wine all over it. One person said they worked at a wedding where the bride dislocated her knee and threw up all over her dress. Another commenter went to a wedding where the venue smelled so strongly of cat urine that people left. It was also next to an airport, so the ceremony had to keep stopping because of the noise of planes taking off. Plus, everybody got food poisoning.

A person was invited to a reception for a friend who had gotten married months earlier at a courthouse. He showed up to find a huge crowd—who the friend's parents had invited without permission. Because of this crowd, the couple decided to go on a second honeymoon instead of having a reception. The parents "had a meltdown" when the reception was canceled. A very expensive wedding was canceled when the groom found the bride was in a relationship with the best man for years, and the couple lost \$60,000. One wedding was ruined when the bride's dad and brother got in a fight with a stranger at their hotel and spent the evening in jail, missing the wedding.

Someone who used to work at an upscale reception hall in New Jersey recalled 2 expensive weddings being utterly pulverized. During one of them, the best man stuck photos of the bride and groom "caught in the act" under every chair—which resulted in fights that pretty much ended the event. One person said they went to a wedding where the groom sang the Sheriff song "When I'm With You" to the bride. That would be enough to ruin it. But what really did it was when the fireworks failed to go off at the end. This caused the groom to yell, "Motherfuckers!" and attack the fireworks man. Apparently, he shoved him into the lake. The marriage ended in divorce anyway because of the hubby's creepy behavior later.

A commenter said her wedding was ruined when her husband's friend urinated on a fence and took a photo of his testicles using a disposable camera that belonged to the couple. And "his idiot girlfriend wasted several more cameras just taking stupid selfies." One poster said her wedding was decimated when her brother-in-law who had volunteered to be the DJ didn't bring any DJ equipment. He also said he would make a video of the ceremony, but he didn't bring his camera. The bride also lost her veil the night before the wedding. At another wedding, a groomsman got drunk and started a fight. In the process, he rolled down a hill in his tux and got covered with mud. He wandered into someone's house and fell asleep on the sofa. At yet another wedding, a groomsman got drunk, broke stuff, stood on tables, and got hauled away by cops.

During one wedding ceremony, a fistfight broke out on the stage of the church in front of everyone. It started because the bride's mom passed out while lighting a candle and the groom accused her of intentionally sabotaging the event. At yet another, the maid of honor got drunk and kept knocking over candles. While the couple was signing their marriage certificate, she knocked over a candle and set the bride's dress ablaze. But the bride wasn't injured. One commenter shared that the reception staff at their wedding dropped an entire case of soft drinks on the \$700 cake. A groomsman at a huge wedding said the groom got drunk and vomited all over the bride's dress halfway through their vows.



One person said that when he was 8, his dad remarried. The 8-year-old was the ring bearer. During the announcements at the reception, he had a loud clap of diarrhea and vomited on the bride's dress. The incident was preserved on video. A wedding that took place in a barn was ruined when the bride's whole family spent the entire evening in the outdoor smoking area complaining about not being allowed to smoke inside the barn. At another wedding, when the minister asked if anyone had any objections, the bride's dad piped up and said, "I'm not stopping the wedding, but the groom is an asshole." The crowd gasped, and the groom's dad began arguing back.

There was one wedding reception where the bride and maid of honor showed up covered with

dirt and bruises. It turned out that the maid of honor had tried to stop the wedding by tackling the bride. At another wedding, someone secretly replaced the desserts with marijuana brownies. An outdoor wedding was destroyed when relatives got in a fight over drug money and the venue made everyone leave. One bride went on a starvation diet for her wedding and fainted just after saying, "I do." Then she tried to sue the church for it. At another wedding, a groomsman got drunk and jumped off a 2nd story balcony to try to land on a chair. All he accomplished was seriously injuring himself and shitting his pants. One partner in a marrying couple wrote of a sulking mom who called the whole family and got most of them to cancel their trip to the reception. This resulted in "food wasted." Just before another wedding, the bride ran off with the groom's brother, so it was decided on the spur of the moment that the groom would marry the bride's sister the next day. Then the groom eloped with someone else.

Studio See it is not.

A fail of two cities

Let's talk about Flock fascism afflicting 2 cities of the same name. One is Dayton, Kentucky. The other is Dayton, Ohio.

Dayton, Kentucky, isn't much safer from Flock Safety's AI spy cameras than neighboring Bellevue is. The main difference is that we haven't caught Dayton leaders with their Incredible Hulk Underoos down around their ankles outright lying about it, like we did with Bellevue. But Dayton has indeed seen a Flock invasion. Not only did city officials smugly gloat about getting new cameras just as a state law passed to limit them, but we have found one within the city. If you head east out of town on 4th Avenue, and go just outside the floodwall, you'll see a Flock camera just south of the street, aiming northeast at the roadway.

This is also while paid trolls and burner accounts have been stampeding into a Bellevue group on Facebook to defend Flock with talking points they cut and pasted word for word from right-wing websites. Until police finally catch whoever kept breaking into my apartment and whoever hit me with a car 7 years ago, Flock apologists need to zip their lip. It's strange how all these devices that supposedly catch criminals are always pointing the wrong way when you need them. The surveillance state was never about catching real criminals, but about control.

Reports that a Flock camera recently caught someone who committed a serious violent crime in another local community have been debunked. There were no Flock cameras involved in solving the case, and none were known to exist even close to the scene.

Now let's talk about Dayton, Ohio. This city has also been saddled with Flock tyranny. Recent reports say the city deactivated its Flock cameras after it was revealed that agencies outside the city were accessing the data for immigration-related searches. It sounds like the city didn't suspend the cameras because this was happening, but because they got caught. Whatever the weather, Flock fascism is continuing in Dayton Public Schools.

As we all know, school districts are fiefdoms unto themselves that operate outside of any other jurisdictions or laws—except of course when it goes against us. Schools always brag that they're not bound by city laws, but that argument was suddenly shoved aside when cities shut down schools during and after COVID. It's yet another case where someone tries to have it both ways by using contradictory arguments to suit the purpose at hand. Dayton schools were so unwilling to do their job that, during the prolonged closure in the winter of 2020-21, the school district not only closed in-person classes but also refused to hold online or remote classes. No school time was being offered at all—for almost 2 months right in the middle of the school year. So it should be no surprise that Dayton Public Schools now uses Flock cameras.

The Dayton, Ohio, school board has just voted to continue using Flock. Nobody even knows how the school district is using the cameras. The *Dayton Daily News* even asked the district for this information, but the district never answered. A school spokesperson told the paper, "The request is still in the process of being fulfilled." How long does it take to answer a simple question like that?

Because of the school system's bullying and evasiveness, we have to assume the worst by default. Although Flock cameras are promoted as license plate readers, they've been found in other communities at places like walking trails and playgrounds, where nobody drives. Is the Dayton school system putting Flock's AI cameras in hallways and classrooms and placing students in a database that can be accessed by law enforcement all over the country? What about playgrounds and sporting

events? Restrooms too???

This scourge isn't limited only to cities named Dayton. Over in Cleveland, a city council committee recently voted not to renew the city's Flock contract, but then council voted to reconsider after interference by right-wing county officials. If the contract is renewed, it will waste \$250,000 in taxpayer money. This type of fiscal mismanagement and Boss Hogg politics is the same reason Bellevue has no money left for anything. And in Roanoke, Virginia, a woman found that the city installed a Flock sound detector in her yard without permission. But there's some hope, as the city of Fort Collins, Colorado, has canceled its Flock contract.

Meanwhile, Facebook has been deleting posts about localized campaigns against Flock.

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