

An American Credo For The 1980s

In 1920, social critics H.L. Mencken and George Jean Nathan published a slim volume entitled *The American Credo*. The purpose of the book the authors explained, tongues firmly implanted in cheeks, was "to put into plain propositions some of the notions that lie at the heart" of the American psyche — or at least that segment of America the pair derisively referred to as "Boobus Americanus" or "the mob": the intolerant, anti-liberty, unthinking element in the nation.

The result was a list of 488 charmingly idiotic beliefs, nonsensical maxims, mawkish sentimentalities, and foolish superstitions, all held as true by large numbers of Americans and thus coloring their world view and their actions.

Recently, while re-reading that collection, it struck me that there is a crying need for a similar American Credo for the 1980s, to focus on

the vast and varied nonsense that unfortunately holds such sizeable numbers of today's population in sway. And so, after much research, prayer, fasting and meditation, I offer, as a beginning, the following list.

It will be observed that virtually all of the items here are political in nature, as opposed to the collection of Mencken and Nathan, which focused more on social delusions. There is good reason for this. While many of the items in Mencken's and Nathan's list are still held as gospel by some citizens, many others have passed out of standing. Relatively few Americans today, for example, believe that "a hair from a horse's tail, if put into a bottle of water, will turn into a snake;" or that "because a married woman remains loyal to her husband she loves him." However, in the realms of politics, economics, and related areas, superstition and falsehood have

replaced knowledge and common sense to a degree that is downright astonishing.

That government is generally inept, despotic, and idiotic was, of course, an article of faith with Mencken and Nathan; indeed, it was Mencken who once said, "I believe that all government is evil, and that all government must make war on liberty." However, *The American Credo* was written before the fantastic follies of FDR's New Deal; before the bane of Keynesian economics; before World War II, Hiroshima and Nagasaki; before television; before the "Great Society," Watergate, "Whip Inflation Now" buttons, and the butchery of Vietnam. Since 1920, government propagandists and special interests have bamboozled the public into accepting an astonishing variety of nonsense, some of it contradictory, some of it laughable, most of it dangerous. Thus, when chronicling generally-held absurdities, the researcher in the late twentieth century must focus on politics and related areas, in much the same way that an M.D., attempting to diagnose a desperately sick patient, will of necessity give relatively little attention to such minor ills as corns, a balding pate, or hangnails.

Here, then for the benefit of future sociologists and psychopathologists, I offer an American Political Credo for the Eighties: delusions that millions of good, true, red-white-and-blue Americans hold dear to their hearts. The list is, of course, merely a sampling, and necessarily incomplete; readers and fellow researchers are invited to submit their own additions.



An American Political Credo

That Richard Nixon will one day be viewed as a great president.
That 55 Saves Lives.

That the Vietnam War was a "noble cause."

That a free-market economy leads to harmful monopolies.

That the Great Depression came about due to unrestricted capitalism.

That President Franklin D. Roosevelt "got us out of the Depression."

That Mussolini made the trains run on time.

That our tax system is "voluntary," or different in any way except sheer size and scope from armed robbery.

That any war in United States history, including the World Wars, has ever been justified by clear and present danger to the U.S.

That government can create jobs.

That the economy can be "planned" by government officials; and that a partnership of government, big business, and labor to oversee the economy would be a wise and beneficial thing.

That politicians, judges, and government bureaucrats take the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution and the Bill of Rights seriously.

That if we could only elect "the right people," government institutions would work just fine.

That the Moral Majority is either.

That liberal organizations formed in response to the Moral Majority differ in any significant manner from Jerry Falwell's outfit.

That Social Security money is kept in numbered, personal accounts; that the Social Security system is solvent, or repairable; that citizens have any legal right to Social Security funds; that the system is a boon to the elderly, the poor, minorities, or anyone else except politicians and government bureaucrats.

That inexpensive foreign goods hurt American prosperity and cost jobs; that one can help the economy and the nation by "buying American."

That the government can "fine-tune" the economy by increasing or decreasing the money supply.

That the government, or anyone else, can predict economic trends rationally.

That corporations pay taxes.

That government employees pay taxes.

That the foreign policy of the U.S. government is chiefly concerned with human rights, liberty, capitalism, and/or U.S. security.

That the MX missile is a "Peacekeeper."

That actresses in pornographic movies are drugged, beaten, raped, and hypnotized in order to force them to appear in these films.

That any boy or girl can grow up to be president of the United States.

That private schools are chiefly utilized by the upper-middle class and the wealthy.

That freedom of speech has something to do with the example of shouting "Fire!" in a crowded theater.

That the gargantuan national debt is okay, because "we owe it to ourselves."

That stiffer laws and their enforcement will slow or halt the importation, sale, or use of illegal drugs in America.

That immigrants take jobs and tax dollars from Americans.

That conservatives believe in less government and *laissez faire*.

That liberals believe in civil liberty and compassionate government.

That government (public) schools foster education, and could do their job better with increased funding.

That "Love it or leave it" and "My country, right or wrong" are intelligent responses to government actions.

That government courts and the government legal system are fair, rational, and effective.

That prisoners are mollycoddled, pampered, and in general treated in kingly manner while in prison.

That government has been, on the whole, helpful to the poor and minorities.

That America has "interests" which compel it to whip around the globe waging war, murdering innocents, and donating huge quantities of arms and dollars to despots.

That the United States would never instigate a nuclear first strike.

That the U.S. defense budget goes for defense.

That Jesse Jackson, the NAACP, the Southern Christian Leadership Council and other prominent liberal black leaders and their organizations represent the views of the majority of American blacks.

That the oil in the Middle East is "ours."

That most American elderly are poverty-stricken, live in unpleasant conditions, and depend upon their small Social Security checks to survive.

That homosexuals—since they cannot reproduce their kind sexually—seduce and abduct the young, vampire-like, in order to assure their continuing presence in society.

That most businesspersons in America believe in capitalism; and that big business, especially, would welcome *laissez-faire* so they could dominate the economy.

That anti-trust and anti-monopoly laws protect consumers from monopolies and price-fixing.

That the concept of "rights" to a job, to decent housing, to food and so on is sensible and humane.

That the Soviet Union is a monolithic empire daily gaining in power and influence around the globe.

That the Soviet military is equal or superior to that of America and her allies.

That "production for people, not for profits" is an intelligible creed.

That upon reaching the age of 18, or 19, or 21, one is suddenly transformed from a child to an adult.

That pornography is a serious factor in child abuse, rape, and numerous other crimes.

That the use of heroin is extremely dangerous to one's physical

health; that heroin use invariably leads to addiction; and that heroin causes one to commit crimes of violence.

That the Food and Drug Administration has saved more lives than it has cost, and has prevented more suffering than it has caused.

That without government, no one would pave roads, pick up garbage, or put out fires; and everyone would rob, rape and murder their neighbors.

This I believe.

—James W. Harris
