

Grasping Reality with Both Hands

The weblog of Brad DeLong. Comments (mostly) welcome, or email me at delong@hey.com with "delong-weblog" as the subject.
RSS feed.

Also on twitter @delong. Since 1999.

Grasping Reality with Both Hands
Note to Self: Slavery Course Topics...

Archives
Grand Narrative: The 20th Century...

Highlighted
Grand Narrative: The 20th Century...

Previously Featured
Reading Big, Difficult Books...

Edit Posts

Coronavirus
Why Are University of Chicago Professional Republicans so Stupid?...

James Buchanan in the Context of Jim Tobin and Herman Wouk...



James Buchanan: <https://www.bradford-delong.com/2019/05/27/>: 'I experienced overt discrimination for being a non-Easterner, a nonestablishmentarian. In the whole group of 600 boys, there were only about twenty who were graduates of Yale, Harvard, Princeton—all Ivy League. By the end of this first boot camp period, they had to select midshipman officers. Out of the 20 boys from the establishment universities, 12 or 13 were picked, against a background of a total of 600. It was overtly discriminatory towards those of us who were not members of the establishment.... From that day forward I have shared in the emotional damage imposed by discrimination, in any form, and "fairness" assumed for me a central normative position decades before I came to discuss principles of justice professionally and philosophically..'

Charles Steindel: 'One interesting thing in this material was Buchanan's groaning about how he was discriminated against in Navy Officer training relative to Yankee Ivy Leaguers. Herman Wouk's recent passing stirred me to reflect on this process. As was mildly fictionalized in the *Caine Mutiny*, Work was outstripped in his training class by none other than Jim Tobin. Yes, both Wouk and Tobin were northern 'Ivy Leaguers' (Wouk Columbia and Tobin Harvard). But the Jew from New York and the Irish kid from Illinois would surely not have seen themselves as more on the 'inside' than Buchanan who, after all, had the same name as (an admittedly wildly unsuccessful) US President..'

IMHO, what Buchanan is complaining about is this: Harvard and Columbia could and did turn people like Wouk and Tobin into effective WASPs by teaching them to turn down the accent and soft-pedal the Blarney and the Yiddishkeit. Middle Tennessee State Teachers College and the University of Tennessee were not in that business at all. Yet he got another chance in the navy—serving on Admiral Spruance's staff during World War II. But that was a chance he did not want to take.

Now, after spending World War II out in Hawaii on Admiral Spruance's staff and marrying Anne Bakke, a Norwegian-American nurse, and then getting your Ph.D. in 1948 at the University of Chicago—after that you have many options. You don't have to identify as a southerner, a governor's grandson, from a family whose land had been "ruined" by the Civil War. (Actually, land is hard to ruin: livestock, buildings, orchards, and most of all slaves can no longer be yours afterwards, but the land, its nutrients, the sun, and the rain are still there. Tobacco can ruin land. But not Sherman.) You could identify as whitish-bread American meritocrat—like Wouk and Tobin—who happened to have been born in the shallow south.

I don't know whether Buchanan thought that would have been a theft of his identity, or whether he would have taken that road if Buchanan's first jobs had been in Vermont and Wisconsin rather than Florida and Virginia.

Or maybe his complaints about discrimination against him were never reflective of any inner experienced reality: maybe they were just a con, an intellectual judo move—I'm not an oppressive Jim Crow-enforcing white establishment southerner—I'm being oppressed!—because being in the dominant race was a central part of his identity.

When one reads "From that day forward I have shared in the emotional damage imposed by discrimination..." and "fairness" assumed for me a central normative position...", one does tend to expect it to be followed by "and so I marched with Martin Luther King, Jr."

One does not expect it to be accompanied by "and so I worked hard to devise plans whereby Virginia's public-school tax collars could be diverted to segregation academies..."

It's hard for me to see and contemplate such a total lack of awareness of self and context.

.#class #ethnicity #equitablegrowth #racism #status #2020-07-16

Posted on July 16, 2020 at 13:47 in [#equitablegrowth](#) | [Permalink](#) | [Comments \(8\)](#)

Comments

JEC said...

Actually, land is hard to ruin: livestock, buildings, orchards, and most of all slaves can no longer be yours afterwards, but the land, its nutrients, the sun, and the rain are still there.

Well...it turns out to be pretty effective to turn a patch of land into a military cemetery and national memorial and fill it with Union war dead. But that's an extreme measure, rarely employed.

Reply July 16, 2020 at 20:46

Graydon said...

Too much analysis.

To be a member of the elite is to automatically win; if your self image puts you in the elite, and you do not automatically win, it's an affront. The whys and wherefores do not come into it; the complaint is the lack of automatic victory, and the lack cannot be amended by explanations.

Reply July 16, 2020 at 21:18

Donald Pretari said...

"George Ball, the diplomat and advisor to President Kennedy (one of who David Halberstam would call 'the best and the brightest'), once observed about Lyndon Johnson that LBJ was hardly disadvantaged by his lack of an Ivy League education. Rather, he said, LBJ suffered from his sense of lacking that education.

That is, LBJ's insecurity about his deficiency was far worse than any actual deficit that may have existed. Isn't that how it usually goes? Seneca's line that we suffer more in imagination than in reality, would indicate that it's been that way for millennia. But more appropriate on this occasion is that essential insight from Epictetus: It's not things that upset us, it's our opinion about them that does. And from Marcus Aurelius too: Choose to feel harmed and you have been, choose not to and you haven't been.

LBJ was convinced that he had been done an injustice by growing up poor and unable to afford a school like Harvard or Yale. On its face, this was absurd—he still ended up being President—but he carried what we would today call 'populist rage' for so long and believed it for so long that it became true. Worse was the result, LBJ was alternately too trusting and too suspicious of those who were more credentialed or smarter than he was. He was harmed by his lack of education...because he harmed himself by believing there was something lacking.

The same is true for us. You're not lacking whatever you thinking you're lacking. It's your opinion that you're deficient that is far worse than any potential deprivation. You've got plenty. You are plenty. Remember that."

The Daily Stoic
What You Think You're Lacking Is The Problem
OCTOBER 10, 2018

<https://www.buzzsprout.com/202128/825857-what-you-think-you-re-lacking-is-the-problem>

Reply July 17, 2020 at 05:59

Zach said in reply to Donald Pretari...

Ah, lovely... the comforting words of the ruling class throughout history; "If you just stop dwelling so much on how we are oppressing you, you won't feel so oppressed."

Reply July 17, 2020 at 06:57

Donald Pretari said in reply to Zach...

LBJ said that? I don't think so.

Reply July 17, 2020 at 12:11

William Meyer said...

But Southern racism was his "culture and heritage." And the world was wrong, bitterly wrong, when it didn't bow down and acknowledge the superiority of his "culture and heritage" but instead condescended to it.

I admit that the so-called superiority of the Ivies is only a coat of paint thick and almost entirely illusory, but just because that type of snobbery is wrong doesn't imply that Buchanan's own snobbery/wounded sense of superiority was any better, or more moral, or more justified.

Reply July 17, 2020 at 12:47

Donald Pretari said...

Let me spell this out. LBJ suffered from the same Southern inferiority complex as Buchanan, and yet, well, read up him. He was important to Civil Rights Legislation. People are making assumptions about Buchanan, accusing him of being something more than just a product of his time. What's up?

Reply July 17, 2020 at 17:01

invhand said in reply to Donald Pretari...

Yes, and this thread is using a universe of examples (presidents, Nobel laureates) who cannot reasonably claim to be oppressed. The question is why they feel oppressed despite ample evidence that they are not. You are not recommending acceptance to someone who is actually struggling.

But I am not sure Zach is in a mood to listen. For him, this thread is having the wrong discussion.

Reply July 19, 2020 at 08:36

Comment below or sign in with [Typepad](#) [Facebook](#) [Twitter](#) and more...

(You can use HTML tags like `` `<i>` and `` to style your text. URLs automatically linked.)

Email address is not displayed with comment.

Name

Email Address

Web Site URL

POWERED BY [TypePad](#)

Donate

Search

Submit

>About Brad DeLong

Brad DeLong's Short Biography