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Petit-Bourgeois “Normalcy” Pining at The New York Times



Photograph by Nathaniel St. Clair

Few things nauseate quite so much as “liberal” professional class pining for “normalcy” – a return to the supposedly good way things were – after Trump and COVID-19.

Look at last Sunday’s *New York Times*’ Sunday Review section. It begins by asking readers what they would give to be standing at a bar in a mid-town restaurant, “post-pandemic, shouting a drink order over your friend’s laughter.”

Give me a break. I couldn’t afford a Manhattan drink even if I drank. I wouldn’t yell my request if I decided to start drinking again.

For “Common Ground” with the Republifascists (While Quietly Bashing the Progressives)

An opening Sunday Review column by the insufferable centrist and *Times* pundit Frank Bruni praises corporate Democrat Joe Biden for “believe[ing] in common ground” with Congressional Republicans who have bought into Donald Trump’s “outrageous alternative reality” and behaved as “traitors to democracy” (Bruni’s words) by playing along with the lie that Trump was cheated out of re-election.

That’s grotesque. The Republicans he wants to reach out across the barstool with signed on with white-nationalist proto-/pandemo-fascism. No self-respecting urbanite “liberal” like Bruni should be seeking “common ground” with these arch-authoritarian, racist, sexist, eco-cidal and eliminationist reptiles. Bruni seeks accord with the Republifascists but issues no call for the corporate Democrats to cease their vicious top-down war on their own party’s progressives, who have the basic decency to advocate policies most of the country wants and needs: Single Payer national health insurance, free public college, seriously progressive taxation, a major increase in the federal minimum wage, the re-legalization of union organizing, and a planet-healing and good job-creating Green New Deal. These are policies that would de-Trump and fascism-proof America.

Bruni’s column is titled “Is Normalcy Obsolete?” His answer is that he hopes not and that he likes how Biden’s belief in “Americans’ goodness and greatness” beckons a welcome return to the supposedly desirable way things were before Trump. Bruni doesn’t appear to understand that, [as Naomi Klein noted three years ago](#), “The ground we were on before Trump was elected was the ground that produced Trump.” The restoration of so-called normalcy under Joe Biden may well bring a more competent, intelligent, and disciplined white nationalist proto-fascism and eco-cidalism back into presidential power (Sen. Josh Hawley of Yale Law School or Sen. Tom Cotton of Harvard Law?) in 2025 if not sooner. The last thing we need is a “return to normalcy.” Another thing Americans really need to drop is their nationally narcissistic belief in their exceptional (mythical) “goodness and greatness” – longstanding cover for epic criminality and oppression at home and abroad.

Equally irritating was journalist Aaron Randle’s Sunday Review ode to how “the continuation of professional sports has been an essential respite and a reminder of the normalcy we yearn for.”

Yearning for the Savage Grace of the NFL

“As we begin to reach toward a semblance of normalcy in coming months,” the National Football League [NFL] and Kansas City Chiefs fan Randle writes, “I wonder if sports might give us an excuse to give one another a little more grace.” [Randle writes](#) this even as he reports a leading epidemiologist’s judgement that “The return of professional sports in America and abroad has ultimately contributed to the spread of the virus.”

Randle should write for himself, not others. Many of us do not “yearn for normalcy.” We know that the previous capitalist, racist, sexist, imperial, nationalist/American-exceptionalist, and eco-cidal “normal” is what got us into the present crisis in the first place. I am a sports-

watcher, but I gave up the gladiatorial blood-spectacle that is U.S. football and the multibillion-dollar right-wing racket that is the NFL many years ago. US football “normalcy” is the chronic generation of crippling, career-shortening injuries, including the debilitation and destruction of players’ bodies and minds. To make matters worse, Randle has a special tribal passion for a team with a racist name and logo. The Kansas City Chiefs’ homefield fans shamefully engage in a mass [Indigenous-mocking song and tomahawk chopping ritual](#) that is deeply offensive to the United States’ original inhabitants.

To Get Hooked Back Up

The most amusing Sunday Review reflection came from *New Statesman* columnist Megan Nolan, who wants readers to know that she left a long-term love relationship in early 2020 “because my desires and needs were not being met by monogamy.” Nolan is depressed that COVID-19 fucked up [“The Joys of Frivolous Sex.”](#) She can’t wait for the passing of the pandemic so that she can get back to “the life I...want,” marked by “casual non-monogamous sexual encounters.”

Good for Megan Nolan. I’m no puritan. I wish her many cool one- and two-night stands in coming years. Still, it’s unfair but a cold fact that bar-centered hook-up culture has helped fuel the pandemic. And I can’t seem to care much about Ms. Nolan’s covid-inflicted sexual disappointment while the nation’s intensive care units are filled with ever more victims of the novel and mutating coronavirus. Is that mean and Victorian of me?

To Get International Flights Cooking the Planet Again

The worst Sunday Review contribution after Bruni’s came from *Times* travel writer Tariro Mzezewa, who [longs for a post-pandemic time](#) when she can “slide into my window seat” on a jetliner to “dramatically moisturize my face and savor my strupenwafel” on a flight to “either New Zealand or Zambia.” Ick. Note to Mzezewa and her editors: international jet travel is both a leading cause of pandemic spread and a horrifically carbon-intensive contributor to anthropogenic (really capitalogenic) climate change, which poses graver challenge to humanity and other living things than COVID-19 (it’s just the biggest issue of our or any time). Here are some sobering reflections from [VOX 13 months ago](#):

“A one-way flight across the Atlantic from New York City to London emits one ton of carbon dioxide per passenger. There are upward of 2,500 flights over the North Atlantic every day. And that’s just one air corridor. Around the world, aviation emits about 860 million metric tons of carbon dioxide every year, or about 2 percent of total global greenhouse gas emissions. Those numbers are poised to soar. The International Civil Aviation Organization projects that emissions from air travel will grow between 300 and 700 percent by 2050 compared to 2005 levels.”

“Those emissions in turn stand to have a devastating impact. The planet has already warmed by 1 degree Celsius since the dawn of the Industrial Revolution, which has caused rising seas and more frequent and intense heat waves. Every metric ton of carbon dioxide emitted leads

to 3 square meters of Arctic sea ice loss. Aircraft also emit several other pollutants at altitude, like particulates, sulfur compounds, and nitrogen compounds, which have an additional warming effect. In some parts of the Arctic under busy air routes, these pollutants combined contribute one-fifth of the warming...So the environmental costs of air travel are huge and growing, and the worst impacts will befall future generations. At the same time, there are very few options to limit those emissions except to not fly.”

Rich and professional class people flying all over the world is more of the “normalcy” that must be dropped going forward. A [recent study by the Norwegian academic and travel research Stefan Gossling](#) shows that 89 percent of people do not fly and that 98 to 96 percent of humanity does not travel internationally by plane. Gossling finds that 1 percent of humanity accounts for half of all aviation carbon emissions, thereby creating one fiftieth of all global carbon emissions.

Perhaps climate activists need to occupy airports and try to force the 11 and/or 4 percent to stay on the ground in 2021.

Sorry to be such a stick in the mud, but, with all due respect, F-Normalcy and professional class privilege and narcissism very much.

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Paul Street's new book is [The Hollow Resistance: Obama, Trump, and Politics of Appeasement](#).