

The Winnies, The Euro, Town and Country



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"Finding the Challenges" is an original column appearing every other Wednesday at Everything-Voluntary.com, by Verbal Vol. Verbal is a software engineer, college professor, corporate information officer, life long student, farmer, libertarian, literarian, student of computer science and self-ordering phenomena. Archived columns can be found [here](#). FTC-only RSS feed available [here](#).

The last few weeks have been extremely pressing for me, mostly because there are so many issues facing us. They are arising faster than the speed with which they can be evaluated. So let's wade in together, plumbing the depths of foreign policy under statism, monetary system misadventures, and what are the implications of the distributions of our urban, suburban, and rural populations.

The Winnies

This past week I came across a column in which there was a list of a 10 worst American foreign policy decisions. The author called these "Shatners," in honor of William Shatner's truly awful attempt to sell a recording. Here's Daniel Drezner's list of bad foreign intrigues from *Foreign Policy* magazine's blog.

- 10 - Operation Continue Hope in Somalia.
- 9 - 1983 Beirut bombing.
- 8 - Bay of Pigs.
- 7 - Sponsoring the 1953 coup in Iran.
- 6 - Operation Iraqi Freedom.
- 5 - Crossing the 38th parallel in Korea.
- 4 - Expansion of the war in Vietnam.
- 3 - The War on Drugs.
- 2 - Refusal to join the League of Nations.
- 1 - 1920s Economic diplomacy.

I was particularly gratified to find the War on Drugs listed, and I share his disdain for most of these gaffes except for number 2). The League of Nations, NATO, the UN are all pitiable instances of wishful thinking.

But I have my own list, inspired most of all by Mr. Drezner's omission of the Yalta Conference in the above list. I have decided to call these citations "Winnies," to commemorate the monstrous egomania of Winston Churchill, although he had a couple of fierce competitors in his atrocious triumvirate, namely Roosevelt and Stalin.

My list:

- The Yalta Conference
- The Treaty of Versailles
- The Manhattan Project
- The War on Terror
- The War on Drugs
- Income Tax
- Imperialism
- The Democracy Litmus Test
- Nixonism
- The 18th Amendment and the Volstead Act

I will explain these "Winnies" in the coming weeks from bottom to top:

The Volstead Act was, you will recall, the act of Congress which implemented the 18th Amendment to the Constitution which was unique in that it removed a liberty from the people. The only other negative amendment in terms of freedom was the 16th, which established an income tax, not a right or its removal but the placing of an obligation. The 18th amendment was also the only one ever repealed.

I have been binge-watching the first two seasons of Boardwalk Empire for the past two weeks. That show has made it clear to me that organized crime metamorphosed from a localized, specialized, urban phenomenon to a national, and perforce international, scourge; and the same could be said for corruption in government, over-zealousness in government, and rampant growth of the federal government.

Some may argue that prohibition demonstrates that anarchy evolves into chaos, because the government was not made strong enough to deal effectively with the upsurge in crime. My response is that such will always be the case. The legislative process makes it impossible to either foresee or to respond to errors in planning. This is a feature, not a flaw, in the American public life system. One of the reasons for this dynamic is that no politician will be forthright about the costs of any program that he or she supports. Another reason is that politicians are never really serious about the window dressing they inflict upon us. They created prohibition to quiet an extremely noisy part of the electorate – to them prohibition was just another case of "giving the voters what they wanted," but then letting it slip into the cracks. It is clear that politicians everywhere regarded prohibition as a vast

money making opportunity.

And make no mistake, American prohibition was of worldwide scope. The economic ripples circled and re-circled the globe. But I cite the Volstead Act as a major calamity not just because of its short term economic effects, but even more because of its role in establishing a cynicism in American politics and public administration that has grown malignantly and enormously to this day.

I will work my way up the list in future weeks.

The EU and the Euro

This past Saturday I began a new adventure. I attended the first session at the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute, under the auspices of the University of Kentucky. The choices of experiences, intended to encourage continuing education among seniors, is breathtaking. I almost didn't know where to start, but through a combination of inclination plus opportunity I came to sign up for two offerings: The Great Decisions discussion program promulgated by the Foreign Policy Association, replicated countrywide, and a local topic, Italian Verismo and the Opera of Giacomo Puccini.

It was the Great Decisions program that I have already begun, and about which I will share some thoughts here with you. The Verismo course starts this Thursday and there is a chance that it may inspire a few reports as well.

First, the Great Decisions group will meet 8 times and watch, then discuss, 8 videos on various topics. This past week the topic was about the future of the Euro, and by extension, the European Union. Here are some of my observations on the event and on the topic:

- No shortage of enthusiasm for lifelong learning is apparent. This group of a dozen, or so, shows a keen intellect and impressive resumes, academic, professional, experiential and avocational.
- I do see, however, a tendency to relate through indoctrinations rather than analysis.
- One of the problems is that there is not much time to get beyond the shallow end.
- On the other hand, we have not been blighted with the presence of any "experts" in monetary policy. It is to be hoped that this blessing will continue into other discussion topics.
- International financiers are hammers, therefore all problems look like banking and public administration nails.
- The presentation and the subsequent discussion seemed to beg a critical question: are the travails of the Euro, or any currency for that matter, solely in the wheelhouses of bankers and politicians?
- Not once was there a question as to whether the state is where a proper solution lies.
- The only inquiries I heard were concerning the immediacy of upping the level of central

planning in the long term vs. imposing sink or swim expectations on the little guys (Greece, Spain, Ireland, Portugal, and Italy) in the short term. Have these people not been watching the USA, UK, and the Russians? And we all know in advance that none will be allowed to sink. Bailouts, anyone?

- No organized decision-making body will include its own dissolution among possible remedies.
- There is an interesting parallel between the Delphi Technique that the movers and shakers present in this case, compared to the sort of false dilemma claimed as the reason for replacing our Articles of Confederation with the Constitution.
- It seems a most delicious irony to me that discussions of American foreign policies should be held under a banner of “Great Decisions.”

I am particularly looking forward to weeks when our group will discuss Syria and Egypt.

The 2010 Census

“Using Census data, we’ve figured out that half of the United States population is clustered in just the 146 biggest counties out of over 3000.” – Walter Hickey and Joe Weisenthal writing at *Business Insider*.

This is a piece of startling news – less than 5% of the United States’ counties hold half of the population. You can see the map at the *Insider* link.

Several questions arise, such as: Are votes distributed in the same way, and what percentage of the population resides in the counties of the “BosWash” megalopolis and in LaLa Land, and how do dying big city governments like Detroit figure into the mix?

I have downloaded some data files for further analysis, and as soon as I decipher some of the ludicrously bad labeling (apparently, NSA is not the only bureau that wishes to keep us in the dark), I will report further to you on notable population trends.

This week I have mostly just asked questions, but I intend to pursue them. It is important for us as voluntaryists to understand the issues in monetary systems, foreign policy, and population distribution.

Surely we have seen enough by now to relieve us of the notion that our governments will supply us with the information that we need to live the voluntary life.