

September 29, 2013

Mark Steyn thinks our prospects are poor.

A few years ago, after the publication of my book America Alone, an exasperated reader wrote to advise me to lighten up, on the grounds that "we're rich enough to be stupid." That's to say, Western democracies and their citizens are the wealthiest societies ever known, and no matter how much of our energies are wasted on pointless hyper-regulation for the business class and multigenerational welfare for the dependency class and Transgender and Colonialism Studies for our glittering youth, we can afford it, and the central fact of our wealth will ensure that our fortunes do not change. Since the collapse of Lehman Brothers in 2008, we have been less rich, and our stupidity ought in theory to be less affordable. Instead, it's been supersized. To take only the most obvious example, President Obama has added six-and-a-half trillion bucks to the national debt, and has nothing to show for it. As Churchill would say, had his bust not been bounced from the Oval Office, never in the field of human spending has so much been owed by so many for so little.

The West's rivals do not think like this. China is now the second-biggest economy on the planet, but it has immense structural problems: As I've been saying for years, it will get old before it gets rich. Thanks to its grotesque "one-child" policy, it has the most male-heavy demographic cohort in history — no chicks and millions of guys who can't get any action, which is not normally a recipe for social stability. Despite being extremely large, the country is resource-poor. But you can't say it's not thinking outside the box. The Daily Telegraph in London reported this week that the Chinese have just signed a deal to lease five percent of Ukraine (or an area about the size of Belgium) to grow crops and raise pigs on. ...

... Obamacare is something new in American life: the creation of a massive bureaucracy charged with downsizing you — to a world of fewer doctors, higher premiums, lousier care, more debt, fewer jobs, smaller houses, smaller cars, smaller, fewer, less; a world where worse is the new normal. Would Americans, hitherto the most buoyant and expansive of people, really consent to live such shrunken lives? If so, mid-20th-century America and its assumptions of generational progress will be as lost to us as the Great Ziggurat of Ur was to 19th-century Mesopotamian date farmers. ...

David Harsanyi thinks its the Dems who caused the hostage crisis over healthcare.

... In a recent exchange on "Real Time with Bill Maher," panelists went a few rounds on the GOP's strategy for the upcoming budget showdowns (wily anarchists or slack-jawed yokels?) and talked about the pros and cons of "hostage taking" before MSNBC's Chris Hayes chimed in with a pretty revealing comment, saying, "I think it is useful to separate the kind of tactical question here from the substantive one, which is to say, like, you know, if there were a liberal caucus in the United States government that could, you know, hold the continuing resolution hostage to try to stop a war that I thought was horrible, I would say, 'Yeah, do it.' The thing that they're trying to stop here is 30 million people getting health insurance!"

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A potential shutdown over the continuing resolution or the debt ceiling would be fine if the issue happened to move the liberal soul. But Republicans can't possibly have a legitimate reason to

want to defund/delay/defeat/de-anything Obamacare. The GOP opposes the law because of an insatiable impulse to deny millions of poor Americans health insurance. If Hayes were to concede that genuine objections existed -- however misguided he might find them -- he'd also be conceding that conservatives have a purpose beyond his own cartoon depiction of free market beliefs.

In this cartoon, Republicans are obstructionists, and that's that. When Reid says any Republican House budget he dislikes is "dead on arrival," how many nonpartisan publications will call him out on his uncompromising position? When the president states that negotiating with Republicans over the debt ceiling "is not going to happen," how many reporters are going to point out that his stubbornness could lead to a government shutdown? ...

Turns out Dems led by Ted Kennedy threatened to refuse to raise the debt ceiling during Nixon's second term. [Instapundit](#) links to a James Taranto column suggesting Kennedy must have been a "terrorist" then since that is what the GOP is labeled now. ... Yet Obama is now in a position very much analogous to that of President Nixon in 1973. We now know that government corruption--namely IRS persecution of dissenters--was a factor in Obama's re-election. To be sure, Obama himself has not, at least so far, been implicated in the IRS wrongdoing as Nixon ultimately was in Watergate. On the other hand, Nixon's re-election victory was so overwhelming that no one could plausibly argue Watergate was a necessary condition for it. The idea that Obama could not have won without an abusive IRS is entirely plausible.

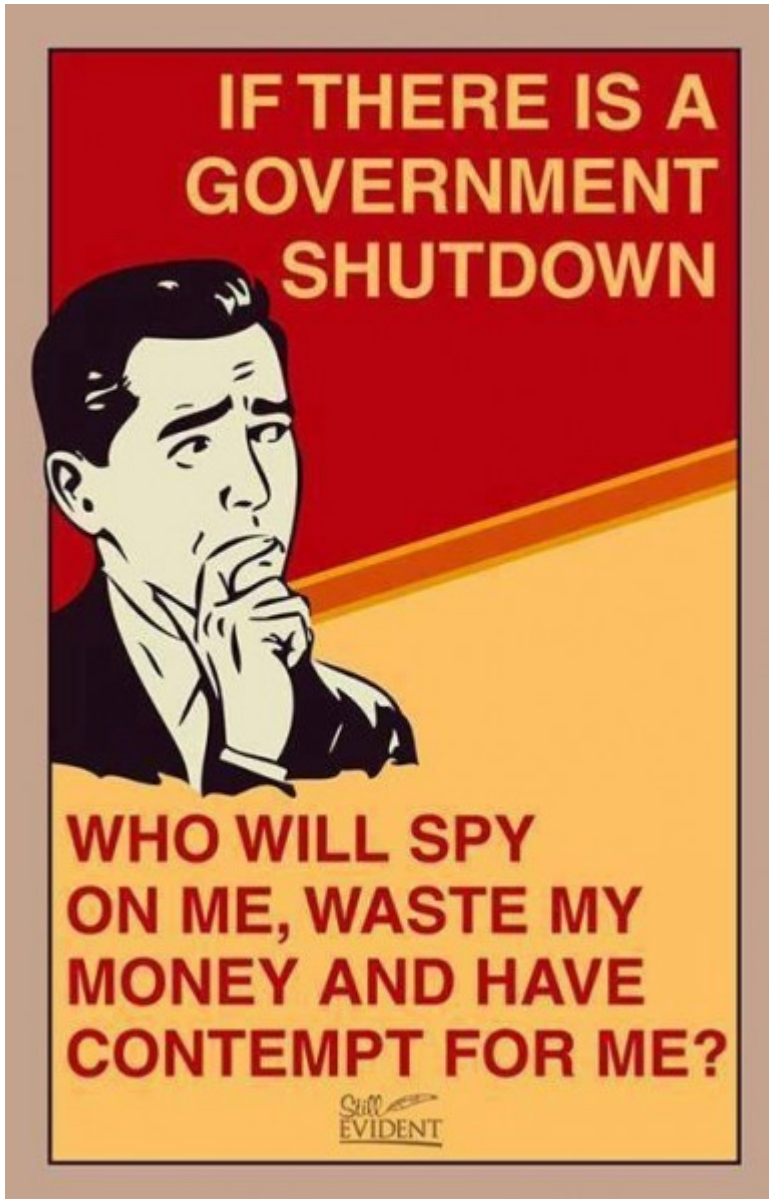
The Obama supporters who counsel intractability overlook the practical political risk of such an approach. Maybe Republicans will back down in the end, but maybe they won't. That is to say, Obama's intransigence could trigger a catastrophic result, and whether it does is beyond his control.

If that happens, maybe the majority of voters will blame Republicans, but maybe they won't. Courting and then presiding over a catastrophe is not exactly a fail-safe plan for strengthening one's presidency. ...

[io9 Blog](#) posts on the mysterious fire that destroyed America's greatest city in 1170! One thousand years ago, in the place where St. Louis, Missouri now stands, there was once a great civilization whose city center was ringed with enormous earthen pyramids, vast farmlands, and wealthy suburbs. For hundreds of years it was the biggest city in North America. Then a mysterious fire changed everything.

The city that once existed in St. Louis' current footprint is known today as Cahokia, and its creators are commonly called the Mound Builders because of the 120 or so enormous mounds they left behind. Shaped much like the stone pyramids of the Maya civilization to the south, these mounds rose up hundreds of feet, and were often built on top of tombs. At their summits were ceremonial buildings made from wood and thatch. Unfortunately, many of these

magnificent creations were destroyed in the nineteenth century when St. Louis was built. Below, you can see one of the only remaining pyramids, known as Monk's Mound. ...



National Review

Worse Is the New Normal

Mid-20th-century assumptions of generational progress no longer obtain.

by Mark Steyn

A few years ago, after the publication of my book *America Alone*, an exasperated reader wrote to advise me to lighten up, on the grounds that “we’re rich enough to be stupid.” That’s to say, Western democracies and their citizens are the wealthiest societies ever known, and no matter how much of our energies are wasted on pointless hyper-regulation for the business class and multigenerational welfare for the dependency class and Transgender and Colonialism Studies for our glittering youth, we can afford it, and the central fact of our wealth will ensure that our fortunes do not change. Since the collapse of Lehman Brothers in 2008, we have been less rich, and our stupidity ought in theory to be less affordable. Instead, it’s been supersized. To take only the most obvious example, President Obama has added six-and-a-half trillion bucks to the national debt, and has nothing to show for it. As Churchill would say, had his bust not been bounced from the Oval Office, never in the field of human spending has so much been owed by so many for so little.

The West’s rivals do not think like this. China is now the second-biggest economy on the planet, but it has immense structural problems: As I’ve been saying for years, it will get old before it gets rich. Thanks to its grotesque “one-child” policy, it has the most male-heavy demographic cohort in history — no chicks and millions of guys who can’t get any action, which is not normally a recipe for social stability. Despite being extremely large, the country is resource-poor. But you can’t say it’s not thinking outside the box. The *Daily Telegraph* in London reported this week that the Chinese have just signed a deal to lease five percent of Ukraine (or an area about the size of Belgium) to grow crops and raise pigs on. And I’d doubt it will stop with post-Soviet republics on the Euro-fringe: It’s not impossible to imagine China buying, say, the Greek islands. Beijing thinks the half-millennium blip of Euro-American dominance is coming to an end and the world is returning to its natural state of Chinese preeminence. The West assumes it can endure as a kind of upscale boutique unaffected by the changes beyond. Like, say, the frozen-yogurt shop at the Westgate mall in Nairobi — until last weekend.

China’s Ukraine deal may sound kinda wacky, but the People’s Republic consumes about 20 percent of the world’s food yet has (thanks to rapid industrialization) only 9 percent of its farmland. As Big Government solutions go, renting 5 percent of a sovereign nation to use as your vegetable garden and pig farm is a comparatively straightforward answer to the problem at hand. By contrast, try explaining American “health” “care” “reform” to the Chinese: You could rent the entire Ukraine for about 3 percent of the cost of Obamacare, and what does it solve? My colleague Michelle Malkin revealed this week that her family has now joined the massed ranks of Obamacare victims: Anthem Blue Cross Blue Shield sent her a “Dear John” letter explaining why they’d be seeing less of each other. “To meet the requirements of the new laws, your current plan can no longer be continued beyond your 2014 renewal date.”

Beyond the president’s characteristically breezy lie that “if you like your health-care plan, you will be able to keep your health-care plan” is the sheer nuttiness of what’s happening. For years, Europeans and “progressive” Americans have raged at the immorality of the U.S. medical system: All those millions with no health coverage! But Michelle Malkin had coverage and suddenly, under what Obama calls “universal health care,” she doesn’t. The CBO’s most recent calculations estimate that in 2023, a decade after the implementation of Obamacare, there will

still be over 30 million people uninsured — or about the population of Canada. That doesn't sound terribly "universal," and I would bet it's something of a low-ball figure: As many employers are discovering, one of the simplest ways "to meet the requirements of the new laws" and still stay just about solvent is to shift your workers from family plans to individual plans, and tell their spouses and children to go look elsewhere. Does it achieve its other goal of "containing costs," already higher than anywhere else? No. Avik Roy reports in *Forbes* that Obamacare will increase individual-market premiums by 62 percent for women, 99 percent for men. In America, "insuring" against disaster now costs more than you'd pay in most countries for disaster.

No one has ever before attempted to devise a uniform health system for 300 million people — for the very good reason that it probably can't be done. Britain's National Health Service serves a population less than a fifth the size of America's and is the third-largest employer on the planet after the Indian National Railways and the Chinese People's Liberation Army, the last of which is now largely funded by American taxpayers through interest payment on federal debt. A single-payer U.S. system would be bigger than Britain's NHS, India's railways, and China's army combined, at least in its bureaucracy. So, as in banking and housing and college tuition and so many other areas of endeavor, Washington is engaging in a kind of under-the-counter nationalization, in which the husk of a nominally private industry is conscripted to enforce government rules — and ruthlessly so, as Michelle Malkin and many others have discovered.

Obama's pointless, traceless super-spending is now (as they used to say after 9/11) "the new normal." Nancy Pelosi assured the nation last weekend that everything that can be cut has been cut and there are no more cuts to be made. And the disturbing thing is that, as a matter of practical politics, she may well be right. Many people still take my correspondent's view: If you have old money well managed, you can afford to be stupid — or afford the government's stupidity on your behalf. If you're a social-activist celebrity getting \$20 million per movie, you can afford the government's stupidity. If you're a tenured professor or a unionized bureaucrat whose benefits were chiseled in stone two generations ago, you can afford it. If you've got a wind farm and you're living large on government "green energy" investments, you can afford it. If you've got the contract for signing up Obamaphone recipients, you can afford it.

But out there beyond the islands of privilege most Americans don't have the same comfortably padded margin for error, and they're hunkering down. Obamacare is something new in American life: the creation of a massive bureaucracy charged with downsizing you — to a world of fewer doctors, higher premiums, lousier care, more debt, fewer jobs, smaller houses, smaller cars, smaller, fewer, less; a world where worse is the new normal. Would Americans, hitherto the most buoyant and expansive of people, really consent to live such shrunken lives? If so, mid-20th-century America and its assumptions of generational progress will be as lost to us as the Great Ziggurat of Ur was to 19th-century Mesopotamian date farmers.

George Orwell, after attending a meeting of impoverished but passive miners, remarked sadly that "there is no turbulence left in England." The Democrats, and much of the Republican establishment, have made a bet that there is no turbulence left in America, and the citizenry will stand mute before Obamacare's wrecking ball. Unless they're willing to accept a worse life for their children and grandchildren, middle-class Americans need to prove them wrong.

The Federalist via Real Clear Politics

Democrats Created the Hostage Crisis

by David Harsanyi

When Sen. Ted Cruz rolled out an epic 21-hour anti-Obamacare "filibuster," his efforts were ridiculed by journalists across the Twitterverse as a useless exercise in would-be obstructionism. No surprise there.

The New York Times editorial board joined in, spitting out an angry editorial accusing Cruz of employing an "aimless and self-destructive Tea Party strategy" -- an egomaniacal attempt to cash in on the impulses of misguided conservatives. However hopeless a liberal cause may be (gun control, cap and trade, Wendy Davis -- take your pick), it's always a worthy idealistic pursuit. Conservatives in uphill fights, on the other hand, are likelier to be fanatics or money-grubbing frauds; the Times can't seem to decide.

Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid took to the Senate floor, as well, and declared Cruz's efforts a waste of time, unpacking his standard lament about the lack of compromise in Washington. Reid reminisced about the early 1980s, offering a personal story about a Republican who had helped him feel more comfortable when he first arrived in Washington. If only today's "anarchists" (his description) were half as cooperative, we'd really get stuff done.

Well, believe it or not, compromise isn't a holy sacrament. It's not a mitzvah. It's not particularly inspiring to voters. Politics is the art of compromising as little as possible, really.

So though conservatives may be fumbling for a plausible plan to deal with Obamacare, the contention that they're more ideologically inflexible than their opponents is preposterous. The only thing more preposterous is the idea that Cruz's crusade will hurt them.

But that's not the only myth. In a recent exchange on "Real Time with Bill Maher," panelists went a few rounds on the GOP's strategy for the upcoming budget showdowns (wily anarchists or slack-jawed yokels?) and talked about the pros and cons of "hostage taking" before MSNBC's Chris Hayes chimed in with a pretty revealing comment, saying, "I think it is useful to separate the kind of tactical question here from the substantive one, which is to say, like, you know, if there were a liberal caucus in the United States government that could, you know, hold the continuing resolution hostage to try to stop a war that I thought was horrible, I would say, 'Yeah, do it.' The thing that they're trying to stop here is 30 million people getting health insurance!"

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A potential shutdown over the continuing resolution or the debt ceiling would be fine if the issue happened to move the liberal soul. But Republicans can't possibly have a legitimate reason to want to defund/delay/defeat/de-anything Obamacare. The GOP opposes the law because of an insatiable impulse to deny millions of poor Americans health insurance. If Hayes were to concede that genuine objections existed -- however misguided he might find them -- he'd also be conceding that conservatives have a purpose beyond his own cartoon depiction of free market beliefs.

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out on his uncompromising position? When the president states that negotiating with Republicans over the debt ceiling "is not going to happen," how many reporters are going to point out that his stubbornness could lead to a government shutdown?

But one of the remarkable and most often overlooked aspects of this debate is that it revolves around perhaps the least cooperative piece of major legislation in American history, Obamacare. Shouldn't those who idealize the D.C. bargain be concerned that a single party took control of a significant chunk of the American economy and compelled every family and business in the nation to participate without a shred of support from the minority party? Even the wing-we-can-get-behind of the Senate -- the John McCains of the world -- weren't on board. Talk about a hostage crisis.

Instapundit

DEBT CEILING:

James Taranto: Was Ted Kennedy A Terrorist? Obama, Nixon and the debt threat.

... This columnist was no admirer of Ted Kennedy, and we view government efforts to control political speech as an affront to the Constitution. But it would be ludicrous to suggest that Kennedy was a terrorist, even though that is the implication of the Pfeiffer-Times-Yglesias argument. Agree or not with its cause, it had significant popular support, in large part because of the corruption of the Nixon White House.

Here is where the analogy to the Nixon years gets very interesting. The Republicans did not sneak into Congress to stage a surprise attack. They were duly elected in 2010 precisely because of widespread public opposition to ObamaCare. That law was enacted by the requisite majorities, if bare ones, in both houses of Congress. Yet while it was not illegitimate, it felt that way, and it would be fair to characterize its enactment as a failure of democratic governance. Had members of the House and Senate responded to their constituents' wishes rather than presidential and partisan pressure, it would have gone down to defeat, probably overwhelmingly.

To be sure, backlash against ObamaCare did not prove sufficient to deny Obama a second term. His supporters claim that even if the 2010 election left the question of ObamaCare unsettled, the 2012 election resettled it. The morning after Election Day, it would have been hard to disagree.

Yet Obama is now in a position very much analogous to that of President Nixon in 1973. We now know that government corruption—namely IRS persecution of dissenters—was a factor in Obama's re-election. To be sure, Obama himself has not, at least so far, been implicated in the IRS wrongdoing as Nixon ultimately was in Watergate. On the other hand, Nixon's re-election victory was so overwhelming that no one could plausibly argue Watergate was a necessary condition for it. The idea that Obama could not have won without an abusive IRS is entirely plausible.

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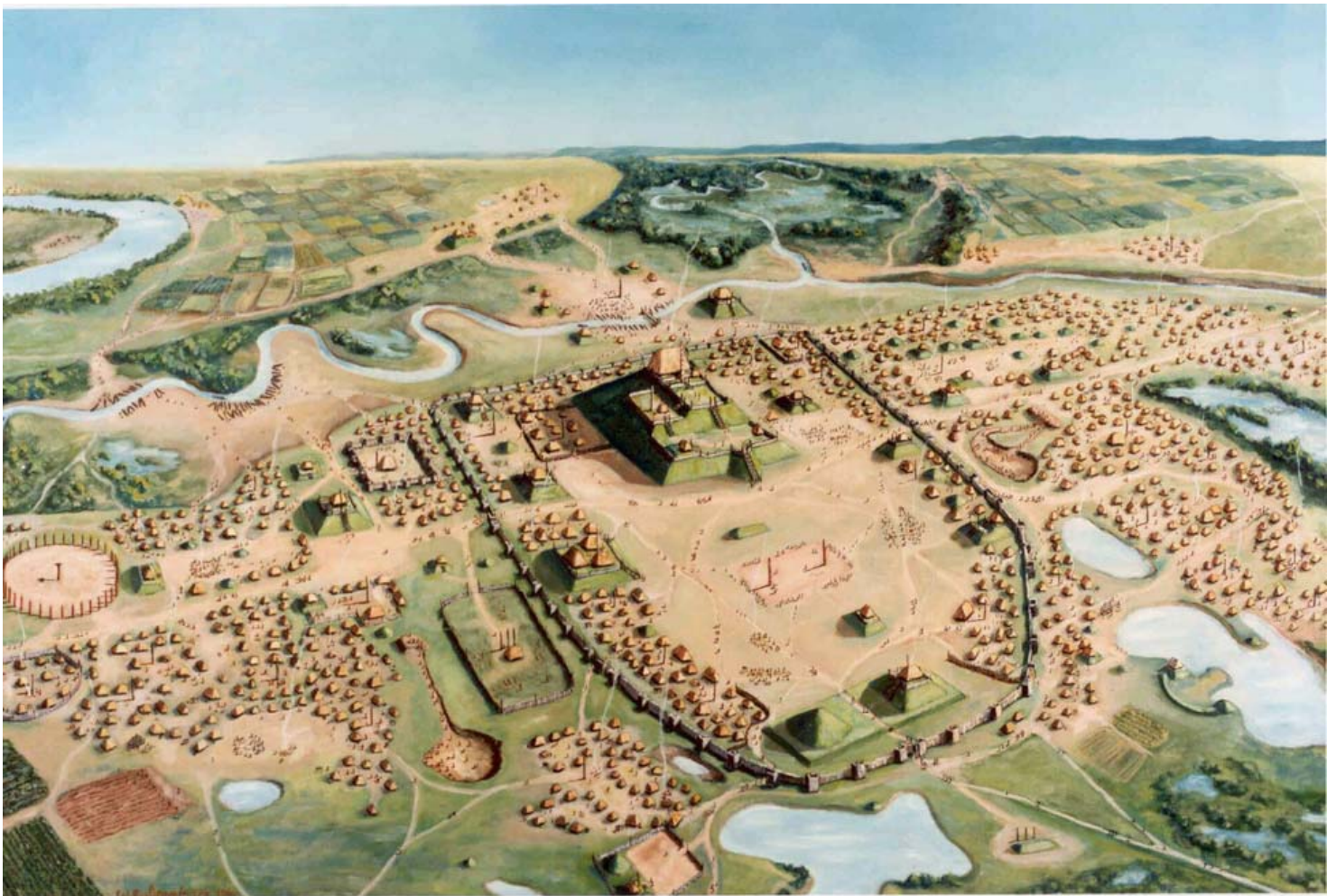
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Obama's line is "the Republicans are unreasonable because they won't compromise — and neither will I!"

io9

[A mysterious fire transformed North America's greatest city in 1170](#)

by Annalee Newitz



One thousand years ago, in the place where St. Louis, Missouri now stands, there was once [a great civilization](#) whose city center was ringed with enormous earthen pyramids, vast farmlands, and wealthy suburbs. For hundreds of years it was the biggest city in North America. Then a mysterious fire changed everything.

The city that once existed in St. Louis' current footprint is known today as Cahokia, and its creators are commonly called the Mound Builders because of the 120 or so enormous mounds they left behind. Shaped much like the stone pyramids of the Maya civilization to the south, these mounds rose up hundreds of feet, and were often built on top of tombs. At their summits were ceremonial buildings made from wood and thatch. Unfortunately, many of these magnificent creations were destroyed in the nineteenth century when St. Louis was built. Below, you can see one of the only remaining pyramids, known as Monk's Mound.



The first evidence of a settlement in the Cahokia area is from the year 600 CE, at a time when the Maya civilization would have been at its peak. But it wasn't until [after the largest cities of the Maya began to fall in the 1000s](#) that Cahokia came into its own. It's estimated that the city center held as many as 15,000 people (making it comparable in size to European cities of the same era), and reached the height of its productivity between roughly 1000-1300 CE.

And right around the middle of that time period, in about 1170 CE, a devastating fire ripped through the main ceremonial plaza at the center of the city. After the fire, it appears that the city was a changed place: New architectural designs sprung up, along with new defensive walls. There was also a sudden influx of clay plates featuring sun symbolism. What happened? Who started that fire?

A new scientific investigation published this month in the *Journal of Field Archaeology* attempts to puzzle out what caused the fire, and what happened in the aftermath. University of Illinois at

Urbana-Champaign archaeologist Timothy R. Pauketat and his colleagues pored over new dig sites in East St. Louis, and examined the evidence for the fire. The evidence is extremely strange.

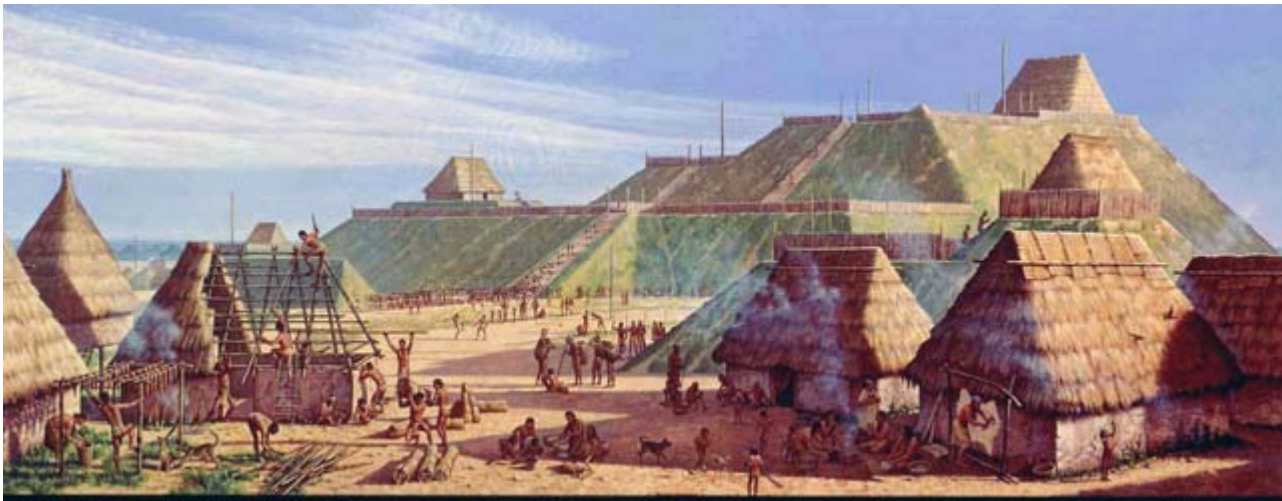
What we know is that the fire likely consumed over 100 thatched buildings, which were all packed with freshly-made luxuries like floor mats, clay pots, pipes, ceremonial bones like snake vertebrae, and baskets of corn kernels. Already, this is a bit odd. A typical home would not contain items that were all new — you'd find garbage, gnawed bones, chipped pots, and corn cobs along with the kernels. In fact, none of these houses had any garbage pits associated with them at all. Adding to the mystery is that these houses seemed hastily constructed, and were placed much more closely together than homes elsewhere in the city. Also, they were built in an area that Pauketat and colleagues describe as overdeveloped but underused, a region more like a public event space than a neighborhood.

The researchers believe that the fire might have been an accident, or caused by warfare. But far more likely is that it was actually a ceremonial fire, a kind of mass sacrifice, which marked a dramatic shift in the cultural and political life of Cahokia. It wasn't uncommon for the Mound Builders to burn the structures they built at the top of mounds in ceremonial events. Often, they would include offerings like the ones found in those burned houses, especially corn kernels. Indeed, these ceremonial fires sound [a lot like Burning Man](#), right down to the drug use — Cahokians liked to imbibe [something called "black drink,"](#) which was a super-strong caffeinated brew that probably got everybody seriously jazzed until they threw up.



But if this fire was sacrificial, it was on a scale that was unprecedented — at least as far as we can tell, from the archaeological record. There are other odd clues about this fire, too. Instead of rebuilding after the fire burned out, it appears that people simply swept up the coal and ashes and put them in tidy piles. Nothing was rebuilt. This is particularly notable because in Cahokia and its outlying suburbs, homes that were damaged were typically rebuilt — often a duplicate structure would be built directly on top of the old one. So if this had been an accidental fire, or a casualty of war, we'd expect to see new homes on top. But there was nothing.

Pauketat and his fellow researchers also note that in the wake of the fire, Cahokian culture seemed to change in very specific ways. One very interesting shift is that people no longer built large, mansion-like homes that we believe were reserved for aristocrats and priests. These "mansions" were built in characteristic L and T shapes, and sometimes a ceremonial building would be circular. After the fire, all of the buildings and homes were square or rectangular. It's possible, suggest Pauketat and colleagues, that the fire was part of an uprising against an established group that had once occupied these more ostentatious homes.



There were other cultural changes too. I already mentioned that there is a sudden rise in popularity of sun imagery on clay plates. It's possible that this was the sign of a new spiritual or political regime in the area. Still, people continued to build their characteristic mounds, and to farm. So many aspects of life remained the same — including the practice of building atop the pyramids. In other words, the old regime may have been toppled but many of the old ways continued on.

What's certain, say the researchers, is that this fire marked a major turning point in Cahokia's civilization, and perhaps the "beginning of the end." By 1400, Cahokia and its environs had been almost entirely abandoned. It's possible that the fire marked a decline in the city's power, and the sacrifices were part of an ongoing effort to bring back the city's former status.

As more excavations are done in East St. Louis, we can hope to find out more about this incredible lost civilization. For now, the story of its mysterious fire is a reminder that ancient civilizations are not monolithic. Like civilizations today, they underwent many changes and revolutions. What to us appears in retrospect to be a single entity known as Cahokia, may have been to the locals many cities and many cultures that just happened to inhabit the same region.

What's fascinating is that this region along the Mississippi is an area that has been home to many cities, for hundreds of years. After all, St. Louis occupies the old footprint of Cahokia today. Perhaps, in another millennium, the archaeologists who occupy some future city in the area will be uncovering the old breweries and coal mines of St. Louis and wondering what happened to the people who worked in them.

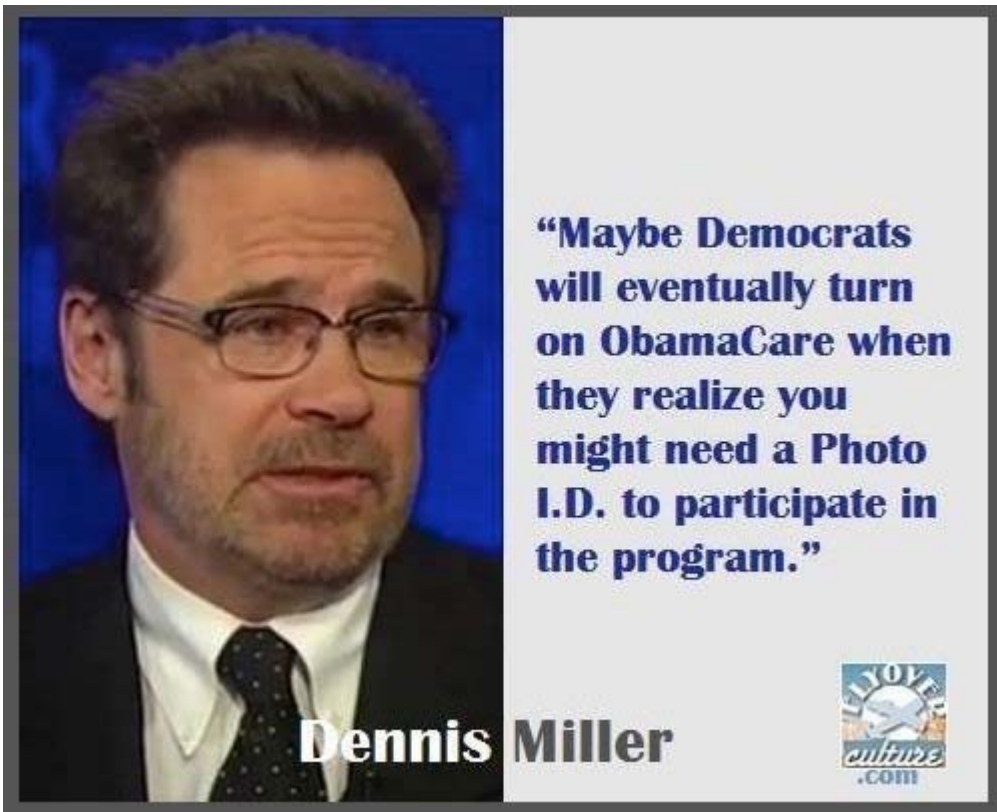
Read [the scientific paper](#), and find out about [visiting the Cahokia Mounds](#).



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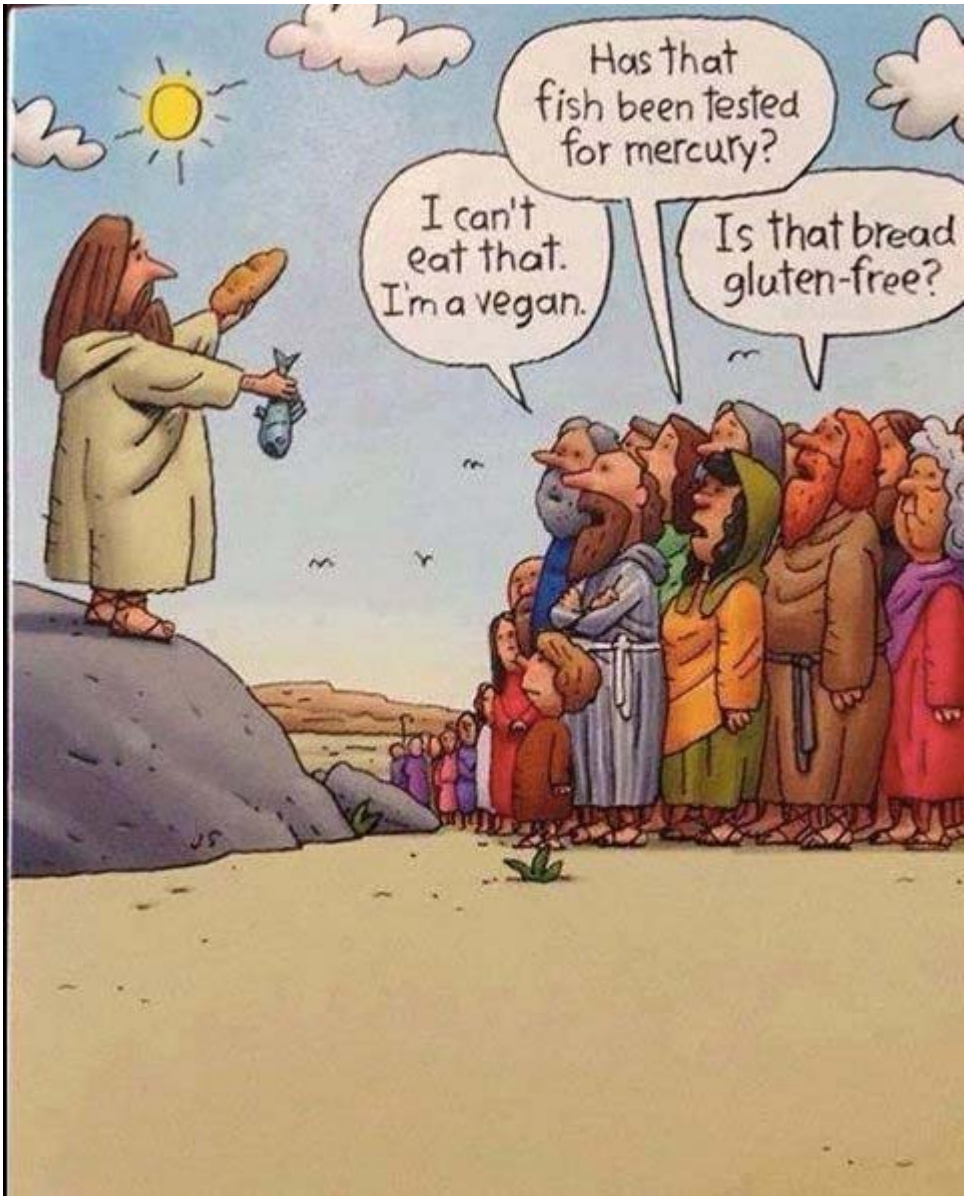
MAKERS



TAKERS



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I can't eat that. I'm a vegan.

Has that fish been tested for mercury?

Is that bread gluten-free?