AMERICA:
FROM GRIDLOCK
TO DEADLOCK

1985-2001

by
Clarence B. Carson

Acknowledgments

The appearance of the book has been much enhanced by Martha Rose Cliatt's imaginative sketches of the persons whose biographical profiles occur here and there throughout the work. We are pleased to acknowledge her fine contribution and our gratitude for it.

Derrick Strelow of Burlington, North Carolina provided the biographical profiles on Thomas Sowell, Rush Limbaugh, Pat Robertson, Albert Gore, Jr., Robert J. Dole, Thomas P. O'Neill, Phil Gramm, Antonin Scalia, Robert H. Bork, Edwin Meese, and Oliver North. We gratefully acknowledge his help.

Once again, I express my fulsome gratitude to my wife, Myrtice Sears Carson, who has not only made my surroundings habitable but has also read copy time and again, read proofs, and helped correct the corrections. Not only has she earned my gratitude but that of my long suffering readers as well by her timely reminders to me that this is definitely my last book.

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ISBN 1-931789-15-0

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Chapter 1
Introduction

The name of this volume was originally *America in Gridlock*, 1985-1995. It has been renamed *America: from Gridlock to Deadlock*, and five or six years have been added to make it cover fifteen years or so, from 1885-2000. It has been lengthened. Four chapters have been added to it; the glossary has been expanded, the index has been expanded to cover the material in the four new chapters, and a student's guide covering these four chapters has been added to the Teacher's Guide.

Some explanation of the words in the title is in order. Gridlock may occur when the roads into an intersection are so congested that none of the vehicles can move toward their destinations. This condition is also described as a traffic jam sometimes. The term may be used figuratively or metaphorically and used relatively rather than in an absolute sense. It is used here mostly to refer to a political situation. Political gridlock may be said to occur when opposing political forces are so arrayed against one another that little can be accomplished.

To go to deadlock is to suggest that things have come to a standstill. That is what happened in the weeks following the presidential election in 2000. The opposing parties were deadlocked over who won the election. Neither side was prepared to concede the victory to the other. That absolute deadlock was actually short-lived, but the closeness of the election of 2000 left the parties so nearly evenly divided that further deadlocks may be expected.

Of course, the country has not been literally gridlocked over the past fifteen years. All movement has not stopped; nor have all changes been stymied. On the contrary, much has been done: by individuals, by groups, by organizations, by companies, by churches, and even by governments. Technological changes of considerable moment have taken place; international trade has burgeoned; great political changes have occurred in many places around the world. Satellite transmissions have made communication around the world virtually instantaneous. Many new names and faces, emerge, and these changes will occupy our attention in what follows. Gridlock

and deadlock play their part particularly in the discussion of government and politics.

Due to the shortness of the time period covered, most of the chapters are not preceded by chronological tables. The last four chapters do not have any chronological charts. Where possible, however, events have been made precise by dates and other identifying characteristics.

Since this book covers only fifteen or sixteen years, whatever the case may be, it may be somewhat short of sweeping historical events. This is made up for by focusing down on the events that are given coverage. The ubiquity of journalism and television has made the longer view somewhat harder to maintain. Television deals with the instantaneous, the momentary, and the passing scene. It shifts quickly from one scene to another. Thus, it is necessary to struggle to attempt to gain or keep some historical perspective.

Chapter 2

The Philosophic and Religious Divide

Underlying and giving rise to the phenomenon of gridlock are assumptions, beliefs, and ways of discerning reality which divide us. Individuals often differ from one another in interesting ways, of course; all sorts of groups do as well. Religious denominations grew out of differences; so do schools of thought. Regions of a country each often have a flavor which distinguishes them from others. Indeed, differences abound in most times and places. Even so, historians often discern what they are sometimes pleased to call a *zeitgeist,* or a spirit of the times. Thus, they spoke of the Enlightenment in the eighteenth century, of Romanticism in the first half to two-thirds of the nineteenth century, and at least one historian wrote of the *Age of Materialism* in the latter part of the nineteenth century.

What we mean when we speak in that way is that in a particular era, century or age there are underlying assumptions which inform how we see, think, say, and do things. A sort of consensus develops and holds sway in a society and even a civilization for some extensive period of time. It gives its character to the literature, the music, the religion, the culture more generally, the politics, and the produce of an age. When the assumptions hold sway they are rarely questioned or even closely examined. The differences, when they lead to disputes, arguments, or debates, will usually be conducted within the prevailing assumptions. The assumptions are not usually thought of as opinions, ideas (subject to change), or even beliefs. They are, to most people in that time, simply the way things are.

What is happening in the decade under consideration is that the assumptions that have held sway—at least in public affairs—are losing their hold. Meanwhile, new assumptions now struggling for acceptance have not yet gained that dominance that would make them determinative. The result is gridlock at several levels. The contest going on is most readily recognizable as being between liberals and conservatives, but it is the purpose of this chapter to suggest and show that it lies deeper than that.

The Outlook That is Losing Its Hold

There are several strains of ideas that have held sway to greater or lesser degree in the United States and much of the rest of the world for some while now. Together they comprise the spirit or outlook that is in our wake now, but still has great influence on us. We will examine several of these strains, not necessarily in the order of their appearance on the scene or their importance.

1. Materialism

This is part of an outlook that began to gain hold in the middle of the 19th century, if not before, and has now become so deeply ingrained in our beliefs and ways of looking at things that it is almost second nature to us. In philosophy, materialism is the belief that matter—that is physical things, flesh and blood, bodies, discernible objects, materials of all sorts—is not only real, but that it is ultimate reality, that it is of ultimate importance.

Materialism, at least the kind that has gained hold on us, is usually humanistic as well. That is, it is humanistic to the extent that it tends to hold human beings and human life to be ultimately the most important of things. Human beings are the be all and end all of reality for humanists. The material well being of human beings is ultimate and final.

Karl Marx, as noted in an earlier volume, championed matter as ultimate reality. He developed a theory described as dialectical materialism which purported to account for what has and will take place in the course of history. Thus, Communism has been a materialistic ideology. Socialism in general is a materialistic ideology, though not all are as crudely so as Communism. It is through socialism that materialism has spread and gained much of its hold on our minds. Materialism is a this-worldly outlook. Whatever is to be accomplished will be accomplished in this world, and whatever fulfillment man is to attain will be in this world.

Most basically, however, materialism is the view that the material alone is real. The mind, if it exists, is coextensive with the brain.

Food, covering, and shelter are necessities, along with perhaps some other amenities. The physical body and its drives or appetites are the main concern of materialists. Physicians and surgeons are the only doctors that matter to materialists, for they deal with the health of the body. Materialists rank medical care very high indeed. Longevity of life is of great concern. Government under the sway of materialism has as its main concern the material well being of the populace. This is especially the case where materialism is linked with democracy. Materialists are apt to attach great importance to diet, to physical fitness, to environment, and the like.

The above is not meant to suggest that the material is of no importance or that the physical is of no account. On the contrary, we are indeed physical beings with material wants and subject to disease and suffering, which we may wish to avoid. No doubt, attention must be given to the supplying of our wants. Materialism is not however, simply the recognition of these wants, it is the giving of primacy to them to the exclusion of much else. It is according them the status of utmost importance.

2. Irrationalism

The sway of materialism in mid-twentieth century America would be difficult to refute. The welfare state is the prime exhibit among proofs. It was the result of the focus of government efforts from the 1930s through the 1970s and beyond on redistributing wealth so as to attend to the material well being of portions of the populace. Some of this government effort was devoted to mental growth by way of education, but even there the material and social side received much of government attention. The spiritual or religious was rigorously excluded from government benefits. Materialism was greatly assisted by the government interest.

Another strain in the outlook of the early and mid-20th century was the focus upon the irrational. This part of the outlook had its roots in the nineteenth century as well, particularly in the works of Sigmund Freud and other or related schools of psychology. Indeed, modern psychology has focused almost exclusively on the irrational or non-rational aspects of thought and behavior. It has focused upon the subconscious, the drives, the urges, dreams, fears, angers, repres-

sions, and longings. If man is rational, it has largely escaped the attention of modern psychologists. In fact, what passes for reason is often identified by them as rationalization for some suppressed desire, longing, or feeling.

In consequence, the spread of psychology and the habits of psychologizing in the 20th century have resulted in the neglect of reason and focus on the irrational. This has often left the individual at the mercy of mob psychology, which is what group irrational opinions tend to become. Irrationalism makes possible all sorts of beliefs, practices, and movements. It can even validate feeling as a kind of measure of all things. When reason has no sway, there is no human means of countering ideas, however unwarranted and irrational they may be. And if the human is the highest there is, there is no authority to which to appeal. There is only force and numbers.

Among the offspring of irrational psychology to gain hold over the past decade is sensitivity training. It is prescribed for those who are discovered to have racial or ethnic or sexist "prejudices." The "politically correct" view is that any uncomplimentary description, especially any slang-like slurs, of any minority group, including women, is prejudicial expression which should be punished or eradicated. On this view, sensitivity training, preferably administered by members of the affronted minority, should be inflicted on the perpetrators. The training would consist of subjecting the offenders to uncomplimentary ideas about themselves so as to sensitize them to the feelings of others.

The emphasis upon feeling, emotion, attitudes, states of mind, and the like, is the offshoot of irrationalism. Socialism and the welfare state are based on a fundamental flaw which is itself irrational. It is that justice is achieved by taking goods from those who have produced them and distributing them to those who have produced nothing to trade for them. This spawn of irrationalism evinces itself in the graduated income tax and every tax that is unequal by way of a means test.

How far the irrational may go was well illustrated in the O. J. Simpson trial and jury verdict in 1995. 0. J. Simpson, a famous football player and later model in advertising and minor actor, was accused of the brutal murder of his former wife, Nicole Brown Simpson, and Ronald Goldman, who apparently happened to be in

the wrong place at the wrong time. So far as is known, the killer(s) was the only surviving eyewitness of the murders. Even so, there was an abundance of evidence that linked O. J. Simpson to the murders. He had the opportunity; that is, he was in the vicinity when the murders occurred. He may have been motivated by his resentment of her promiscuity. He had a history of threatening behavior and physical abuse of her. An unusually large amount of circumstantial and indirect scientific evidence linked O. J. to the crimes: the bloody trail of bloody footprints from the scene, blood on his vehicle, on clothing, on gateways, and so on. No other suspect has ever been located, and no one else was charged in the case. O. J. did flee from the arrest and led police on a lengthy chase. Simpson did not testify in his own defense, nor was any credible witness ever found to testify that he was elsewhere at the time of the murders. Whereas, uncontradicted testimony placed him at his home (which was in the vicinity of the murders) just before and just after the murders.

After months of compelling evidence against the defendant, the jury took only four hours to conclude that O. J. Simpson was not guilty. Several jurors, when questioned outside the courtroom, claimed *reasonable* doubt as to his guilt. Judge Lance Ito, the presiding judge, had allowed evidence that one of the police witnesses, Mark Fuhrman, was racially prejudiced. In their cross-examination, the defense attempted to twist evidence of police carelessness into a case for the blood evidence against Simpson being tainted. Also, they implied that evidence was planted by the police. No facts of actual tainting or planting was ever brought before the jury. If such factual evidence had been introduced and allowed to stand, it might have been racially motivated. As it was, the alleged reasonable doubt was at best irrational. Reason dictated a guilty verdict. Irrational feelings produced a not guilty decision. In the ensuing discussion following the verdict much was made of the fact that the jury was predominantly black, that O. J. Simpson was black, and that the two persons murdered were white. Be that as it may, it is the low standing of reason generally that makes such decisions likely.

The truth is that reason has been given short shrift generally in what passes for education in the 20th century. Philosophy courses have long since been driven from most high schools and little re-

mains of it in colleges and universities. Logic is no longer much taught. Not only are the young not taught to reason (if that is possible), but even more crucially they are not required to reason, to test statements for their reasonableness, nor rewarded for reasonable presentations or punished for their irrationalities. In consequence, they do not get a clear view of the order in creation. For good unreason, of course, for it would bring them perilously close to the Creator.

3. Statism

Statism is the ideology based on the power of the state. It is, not to put too fine a point on it, the worship of the power of the state. Rulers, in other times, have been thought of as possessing god-like powers and have sometimes been thought of as the fathers of their people. In the 19th and 20th centuries, an abstract idea called the state, or government, has assumed the powers of providing for the well being of people under them. To that end, great powers are concentrated in the government. It is given the power to tax away much of the wealth of the populace and to disburse it so as to take care of the wants and needs of people under it.

Government is assumed to have great compassion, to possess almost magic powers to do what people in their private and individual powers cannot do, and to have wisdom beyond such as any single man might possess in establishing justice and right. Statism has only been indirectly advanced in the United States. Americans do not openly proclaim statism and worship its power. Yet we came to be more and more dependent on government over the past seven decades. Great power has been concentrated in the United States government; the wealth of the country has poured into its coffers. And we look to the Federal government as if it could supply all our needs.

4. Democratism alias Collectivism

What authenticates and vindicates this political system for many appears to be the belief that the United States is a democracy. Those who govern proclaim democracy; the sentiment that it prevails, or

should, in the United States is ratified by the teachers, preachers, journalists, the media of communication, and by most who pronounce on such things. More, the United States has been for some time committed to spreading democracy to lands in which it is not now established.

Simply defined, democracy means rule by the people. What the Greeks, who invented the notion, meant by democracy was direct rule by those entitled to vote. To that end, the citizens might meet in a body to decide questions affecting the city-state. The practice was not much admired by the great political thinkers of Classical Antiquity, and only the idea survived the decline of Greek civilization. Nor did modern political thinkers of the 16th, 17th, and 18th centuries think more highly of democracy. Though the New England colonies had a version of local democracy in their town meetings, the makers of the United States Constitution did not see fit to establish a democracy. So far as they considered it, they thought the country was too large to assemble the voters in one place, and that if it were practicable it would still not be a good way to arrive at thoughtful and reasonable decisions. Instead, both nationally and in the states, the Americans established representative governments which they described as republican in form.

Even so, by the end of the second decade of the 20th century the United States was well on its way to establishing what might more appropriately be called democratism. That is, it was well on its way to having an ideology or faith or religion of democracy. It still did not have a direct democracy, but changes in practice and in the Constitution had moved the country in the direction of democracy. The electorate was greatly expanded both by the legislative removal of property restrictions on voting and by the ratification of the 15th Amendment in 1870, and the 19th Amendment in 1920. The 17th Amendment ratified in 1913 provided for the direct election of Senators. After the Civil War, all states had provisions that members of the Electoral College, which elects the President, be popularly elected. Presidential primaries now usually determine the party candidates for President and while the November popular vote is technically for electors state by state, in practice it determines who will be President. Opinion polls which become more and more

numerous, frequent, and varied in their techniques, add to the democratic appearance of our government.

It is democratism as a religious-like faith, that underlies the thrust toward a more democratically controlled government. It is democracy as a secular ideology, the ideology which treats "democracy" as if it entailed equality, all sorts of rights and privileges, the belief in the dignity and worth of the individual, an attachment to the experimental method of science, and as well as a way, of course, of making political decisions. It was John Dewey, more than anyone else, who made this muddle of democratism. He made it the highest value in the society, as far as he, and many who have followed in his path were concerned. That is why it should be called democratism; that suggests a faith beyond questioning and reasonably examining it.

"Democracy," in common usage, is not far from being a synonym for social democracy. Social democracy is a phrase used widely in Europe to describe democratic socialism. But since American socialists do not usually identify themselves as such, they often call themselves liberals and sneak in socialist programs under the guise of democracy. This is especially the case when Americans work to set up and support democracy in foreign lands. They also export welfare state programs which derive from the socialist vision. Thus, democracy becomes a cover for socialism.

In the United States the thrust to democracy has also been the thrust of collectivism. All group activity is more or less collective. When group activity is given preferred status, it is on its way to becoming collectivism. Democracy is a collective mode of decision making. When democratism prevails, democracy has become a positive good to be sought and extended. Collectivism, in the 20th century usually some variety of socialism, is the result. The group is usually preferred over the individual, and they are frequently given preferential treatment. Labor unions have been a prime example in the United States.

5. Other Strains in the Fading Outlook

Progressivism has been a prominent strain in the outlook that prevailed for much of the 20th century. It was especially in vogue in

the earlier part of the century. Progressivism is the ideologizing or politicizing of the idea of progress. That idea has been around for several centuries, at least, and is essentially the view that things are improving. Two developments gave great impetus to the idea of progress. One was the great spurt of inventions in the 18th and 19th centuries. The inventions and technologies which applied them gave obvious evidence that progress, of sorts, was taking place. The theory of evolution gave less visual evidence of progress but probably had greater impact. Darwin's evidence of evolution within species and hypotheses about the origin of species had a profound effect on many of his contemporaries. What was implied in the evolutionary claims was that higher and higher levels of life had evolved over great spans of time. This was a grand, or at least grandiose, course of progress.

Progressivism is an ideology of progress, a view that progress is taking place generally, that the latest is the best, and that just about any movement is progress. In politics, the idea got attached to reform-though it was also more conservatively applied by some against reform. Reformers, especially those of a socialist turn, used progressivism to give an aura of improvement to their programs. Anyone who opposed them was castigated as backward and reactionary. If the latest is the best, then their innovations are the latest and therefore the best. Progressivism could be, and was, applied in all sorts of other directions as well.

Darwin's theories of biological evolution gave rise to another related strain in the outlook that has prevailed for much of this century. It is Naturalism. Naturalism is the view that arises from the belief that man is just another animal in the stream of evolution. In *The Descent of Man,* Charles Darwin claimed that man had descended from lower animals. Man was not created, nor, if Darwin be accepted, was there any longer any need for there to have been a Creator. The logical conclusion from this was that far from a little lower than the angels man was only a little higher than the apes—perhaps. That part of the environmentalist movement which is so deeply concerned with the animal kingdom and, indeed, all of living things, is an offshoot of naturalism.

Secular humanism knits many of these strains together. It is a secular religion that tries to give man a high place in a world without

God. It elevates the human to high status without any foundation to rest upon. One of its best known products is the alleged "human rights" people are supposed to possess. The Founders of the United States generally believed that man has rights, but they believed them to be *natural rights.* That is, they were rights, as Jefferson said, resting on "nature and nature's God." They were bequeathed to man by the Creator. Secular humanism leaves God out of the equation. It is a religion of man without God.

Most of these strains listed above may be more cogently linked together by socialism, and especially by Marxian Communism. Marx was a committed materialist, as already noted, the propounder of a system based on the irrational premise that the state would wither away, whereas under Communism the state gained new standing and power. Social democracy was the primary creed Marx and his followers proclaimed. The Bolsheviks (the majority) who brought off the Bolshevik Revolution were one branch of the Social Democrats in Russia.

If secular humanism was an earthly substitute for transcendental religion, pragmatism was the American substitute for philosophy in which all truths were held to be relative. Pragmatists not only accepted relativism as the rule but maintained that they could operate very well, thank you, without truth, which they preferred to refer to as "absolute" truth. They would operate on the basis of what worked in practice. Why anything would predictably work, if there were no laws, no absolutes, and no underlying order in the universe, they never got around to explaining.

In any case, relativism enjoyed quite a season in the 20th century, at least in academic circles. Relativism undoubtedly describes an aspect of our experience that at least has the feel of being valid. Much does appear to be relative to time, to place, and our angle of vision. Circumstances and situations do sometimes alter appropriate responses or reactions. If there is only time and the passing scene, that is, if there is no enduring and especially no eternal, then everything is indeed relative to everything else.

If there is, however, a Creator, an order in the universe, absolute truth, a transcendental God, then man is quite differently situated than if none of these exist. So saying, we come to the great divide, to

the assumptions, ideas and beliefs which now challenge the waning *zeitgeist.*

The Permanent Things

There has never been a time, of course, when a considerable number of people did not accept, or at least would not have affirmed, some or all of the underlying premises of the prevailing outlook during much of this century. Nonetheless, the outlook and many of the premises held sway in the colleges and universities, and still do. It informed the actions of politicians. The literature drew much of its sustenance from these premises. While the majority of Americans still professed a belief in God, religious belief was increasingly relegated to a private sphere. When prayer and bible reading was proscribed by the Supreme Court in the 1960s, the leaders of the main line denominations: Presbyterians, Congregationalists, Methodists, Disciples, Episcopalians, and the like, approved the move, even if many of their members did not. Above all, the secularist outlook pervaded American culture: the movies, the popular music, the textbooks used in schools and colleges, the theaters, sports, and the workplace. For a whole era, the temporal and changing, the material, the irrational, socialist premises, the belief in man, the celebration of the democratic and collective pervaded the land.

Even so, at worst the belief in permanent things did not entirely disappear. Here and there they survived as the belief in a transcendent God, in the order that subtly pervades His Creation, in the enduring, the eternal, the fixities, in natural law, in that which changeth not, in the spiritual as superior to the material. Priests, preachers, and rabbis always read about such things from the Scriptures to their congregations, and here and there people grasped them as truth. Some of those who grasped these truths ceased to accept that they were private matters and saw they must be publicly professed. The words of Jesus to those who would have him quiet the throng during his triumphal entry into Jerusalem bear upon this point:

> And when he was come nigh, even now at the descent of the mount of Olives, the whole multitude of the

> disciples began to rejoice and praise God with a loud voice for all the mighty works they had seen.
>
> Saying, Blessed be the King that cometh in the name of the Lord: peace in heaven, and glory in the highest.
>
> And some of the Pharisees from among the multitude said unto him, Master, rebuke thy disciples.
>
> And he answered and said unto them, I tell you that, if these should hold their peace, the stones would immediately cry out. (Luke 19:37-40)

Men do not willingly keep great and joyous beliefs and discoveries to themselves. Rather, they tell others and spread the word of them abroad. More, they apply them to the warp and woof of their lives.

Now what follows is not primarily about the spirit of the times, or *zeitgeist,* as the reigning views of the first two-thirds of the 20th century were described. It is about the spirit of the eternal, not what appeared to men to be so for a season, but what claims to be true for the ages. These are the premises that underlay a seismic shift in this time. In the decade just past they have produced gridlock. To say that a shift from the material to the spiritual, from the temporal toward the eternal, from the irrational to reason and law, from the collective to the individual, the family, and the community has already taken place would be to claim too much. The most that can be affirmed here is that many premises of ancient lineage are being increasingly given voice in these days. The assumptions may not be as clear as the conclusions many are reaching or expressions they give to them. Some of the more deeply religious assumptions will not be affirmed by all who announce conclusions that depend upon them. Even so, they need to be.

So far as the present writer can determine the underlying assumptions of the belief in the permanent things are to be found in religious teachings. For example, the potentiality of man to reason can be affirmed without necessarily resorting to any religious affirmation of it. On the other hand, it appears to be the case that the full use of reason may be contingent on the affirmation of a creator God. In any case, the appeal here is to the Old Testament and New Testament of the Bible, which is to say, the Judeo-Christian teachings.

The Bible affirms that God is eternal:

> Lord, thou has been our dwelling place in all generations.
>
> Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever thou hadst formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, thou art God. (Psalms 90:1-2)

In sum, God is permanency personified, as the Psalmist says, from everlasting to everlasting.

The other most fundamental premise is that God created all that is or was. What follows is the most direct account of it in all Scripture:

> In the beginning, God created the heaven and the earth.
>
> And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters.
>
> And God said, Let there be light: and there was light....
>
> And God said, Let the earth bring forth grass, the herb yielding seed, and the fruit tree yielding fruit after his kind, whose seed is in itself, upon the earth: and it was so....
>
> And God said, Let the waters bring forth abundantly the moving creature that hath life, and fowl that may fly above the earth in the open firmament of heaven.
>
> And God created great whales, and every living creature that moveth, which the waters brought forth abundantly, after their kind, and every winged fowl after his kind: and God saw that it was good....
>
> And God said, Let the earth bring forth the living creature after his kind, cattle, and creeping thing, and beast of the earth after his kind: and it was so....