

Whine, the Beloved Country!

By James K. Glassman

George (Jack Nicholson): You know, this used to be a helluva good country. I can't understand what's gone wrong with it.
Billy (Dennis Hopper): Man, everybody got chicken. That's what happened, man.

—Easy Rider

Actually, it's still a helluva good country, but Billy has a point. Lots of people got chicken. Or more precisely, lots of people started whining.

There is a new culture of complaint in America, and it has surfaced with a vengeance in the recent clamor over outsourcing. Outsourcing—the purchase of services abroad by U.S. companies—is simply another form of trade. And trade, as economists since Adam Smith have pointed, is beneficial to both sides of the transaction.

Yes, trade can plunge previously insulated workers into competition with foreigners. That can cause pain and lost jobs. What's troubling is the reaction here to that competition. Understand that outsourcing is a pebble in the ocean of macro-economic effects, compared to the boost to the economy from tax cuts and low interest rates and the drag from the terrorist attacks. But the recent reaction to outsourcing makes it seem like a tidal wave.

The reaction: whining, whining, complaining. Indians and Chinese are stealing our jobs. They work for cheap. "We can compete with anybody...if we have a fair and balanced playing field," said Senator Tom Daschle (D-SD) in an interview with CNN's Lou Dobbs. "It's

not fair today and we know that."

Not fair! Was life "fair" to the forebears of today's complainers when they came to America without a job or grasp of the English language, without education, without welfare? Was life fair to the Americans who made their way to, say, the plains of South Dakota, fighting vicious weather and difficult farming conditions?

And it's not just outsourcing that brings out the crybabies. Encouraged by trial lawyers, Americans now seek redress for practically every grievance, including the fact that they are fat, or that banks lend them money when they're not credit-worthy. "Cable TV made a West Bend man addicted to TV, caused his wife to be overweight and his kids to be lazy, he says. And he's threatening to sue the cable company," reported a Wisconsin newspaper recently.

The truth is that life in America has improved so much in the past century that we have forgotten what it is to struggle. We hear whines that schools are overcrowded today. Actually, the ratio of students to teachers has gone from 30:1 in 1955 to 19:1 now. We hear whining about pay. Yet total compensation, adjusted for inflation, has *tripled* since 1947, and the cost of necessities has plummeted. Food in 1950 represented about one third of a family's total expenditures; today, it's one seventh.

Our advantage over the Indians and the Chinese—and the Italians, for that matter—is that we have the world's best system of college education, its most vigorous entrepreneurs, its most abundant capital. Is it *fair* for Americans, with our rich infrastructure, our clean water, our



incredible financial markets, to compete against poor Indians who have to climb over sleeping beggars on their way to work? Who should be complaining here?

America's Gross Domestic Product is greater than the next five countries combined. Our unemployment rate of 5.7 percent—while higher than it was before the 2001 recession—is still lower than the average U.S. rate in the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s. Unemployment in France is 9.6 percent. In Germany, 10.4 percent. And we're complaining?

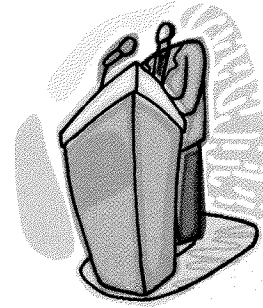
Two thirds of Americans now own their own homes. We have more cars, more children in college, more cultural institutions. We work shorter hours. Yes, some people have trouble making ends meet, and over the past few years many hard workers have lost their jobs. But on the whole, we're more prosperous than any other nation in history—and far better off than we were in the past.

And still, Americans complain.

As the late Gilda Radner of "Saturday Night Live" joked endearingly, "It's always something." But there is a darker side. Too much whining could presage a decadent and complacent America (much like present-day Europe) where every obstacle and minor setback is viewed not as a challenge, but as a personal affront. And of course someone else's fault.

Can an economy built on the bracing principles of "creative destruction" survive in a society that demands an easy ride everywhere? Not on your life.





Kerry the Un-Electable

By Grover Norquist

When John Kerry won the Iowa caucuses on January 19, Democrats bravely told themselves they were voting for electability. All the other challengers had nailed their colors to particular Democratic party special interests. Howard Dean was the candidate of left-wing anti-Bush enthusiasts; John Edwards of trial lawyer money and the South; Dick Gephardt of labor unions; Joe Lieberman of the disappearing moderate Democrats; Al Sharpton and Carol Moseley-Braun of the African-American vote.

Crowning Kerry with the virtue of "electability," though, is like a teenage boy telling a young lady she has a "good personality." That usually means you can't think of anything better to say.

Surely Kerry is a stronger candidate in a general election than Dean. Or is he? Howard Dean was seen as out of the mainstream on two issues: His venomous opposition to the Iraq war and his early support of civil unions for homosexual couples. Dean opposed the Iraq war at a time when many expected U.S. troops to find buckets of anthrax beneath Baghdad. That would have crippled the candidacy of any vocal opponent of the war. But the expected WMDs were not found, and though Dean's skepticism may not be a vote winner in a general election, it is probably not a fatal liability. And his radical, too-weird-for-middle-America position on civil unions is suddenly the default position for many conservatives—including President Bush—who have made stopping same-

sex marriages their priority instead. Even Dean's disastrous rant on Iowa's election night would have been treated as cute if he had won.

While Dean would have been no prize candidate, John Kerry is actually a weaker one on several fronts. Kerry has served in the Senate for 19 years and has a voting record best described as a "target-rich environment." His votes closely track Senator Edward Kennedy's—during a period when Kennedy's Presidential aspirations had given way to his run for the title of "History's Greatest Liberal Senator." This long, publicly-available-on-the-Internet voting record has already exposed Americans to Kerry's 350 different votes for higher taxes. The American Shareholder Association has compiled a book of Kerry's attacks on the investor class, beginning with 15 votes against reduction of the capital gains tax.

Kerry, like Michael Dukakis, grew up in a politically isolated community. Dukakis actually believed he was being politically appealing when he bragged that he was a "card carrying" member of the ACLU and opposed mandatory flag saluting. Pundits speak of coming from "Inside the Beltway" as a signal of a Washingtonian's distance from middle America. But if you come from inside Route 128—which rings Cambridge and Boston—you occupy a different political planet from most Americans.

John Kerry (like Al Gore before him) suffers from the very opposite of the challenge faced by Johnny Cash's "A Boy Named Sue"—whose unconventional name forced him to learn to defend him-

self at a young age. Neither Kerry nor Gore had to defend or rationalize their core left-of-center values growing up—not at prep school, not in college, not among the liberal peers or family members who circulated in their wealthy circles. That is why both men bristle at any criticism or challenge: They have never faced it before.

Kerry also faces the Gary Hart problem: The press has so far loyally refused to print anything seriously negative about him. The journalists who covered for Hart's philandering did him a false favor. When he reached the highest level of competition, he was scorched by a level of scrutiny he had never had to face before. Kerry's unpleasant personality and his fellow senators' dislike of him are widely known by reporters in Washington—but so far not written about.

The last challenge is one any Democratic nominee would face. Every left-of-center voting bloc wants Kerry to win, for sure. But plenty of leading Democrats wouldn't mind seeing him lose: If Bush wins, the Presidency would be available to them in 2008 as an open seat. If Kerry wins, the next clear opening doesn't come up until 2012.

President Bush, on the other hand, is surrounded by ambitious Republicans who wish him well and prefer a retiring Bush and Cheney in 2008. Even the Bush-hating John McCain would prefer that scenario to running against an incumbent John Kerry in 2008.

