

secondary job, her chief responsibility being to look after Joe and put his life in order. She began by taking charge of his finances and getting him off the hook with the IRS, on whose point he had been impaled, squirming, for several years.

Both Joe and I were extremely fond of Timothy Dickinson, the Oxford man. Timothy knew more than most encyclopedists have forgotten, but that was not what you first noticed about him. Week in and week out, he dressed in a morning coat possessed of its own peculiar elegance, but not of the sort that would have brought Bertie Wooster's friends at the Drones Club flocking to learn the name of his tailor. The waistcoat was spotted, the trousers fell short of the ankles, and Timothy's socks were usually falling over the tops of his shoes. He wore a monocle and a (more or less) fresh boutonniere and invariably carried a walking stick that ended in a bare protruding screw from which the head of the stick was missing. Timothy was (I hope he still is) one of the most charming men I have ever known, and lunch with him and Joe (as well as, now and then, Tom Wolfe) was an occasion straight out of an English literary memoir dating from about the period of Ronald Firbank. I shall never forget the afternoon when Timothy, standing with me on the sidewalk outside the Lebanese restaurant where we had lunched with Wolfe, dropped his cane on the pavement and got down on all fours to retrieve it, scrambling blindly at the feet of the tall, impeccably white-suited figure of the author of *The Bonfire of the Vanities*. I don't remember whether Joe was present for the occasion; if not, his superb sense of humor would have known what to make of it. I do know that he was along when, returning together from lunch at Paoni's, the three of us breasting the hill side by side, Timothy was hailed by Linda Bridges following behind on East 35th Street. "Oh, my dear Linda!" Timothy exclaimed, turning round in his tracks. "You do have the most remarkable ability to recognize peo-

ple from behind!"

In 1981 I moved to Wyoming. I saw much less of Joe after that, since I was in town for only a few days each month and had many other old friends to see and catch up with when I visited. After his marriage to Jeanne, Joe moved to Princeton, where his wife owned a house. Ordinarily, he took the train from New Jersey to Midtown Manhattan, but on occasion he made the trip by car. Late one afternoon, looking down through my office window onto 35th Street, I saw his battered and faded van parked at the curb, directly in front of the building. Having something to say to Joe, I hurried downstairs and into the street. Joe was not behind the wheel, or anywhere else. The van was a long way

from empty, though. Every seat except the driver's was piled with books, magazines, newspapers, and cassette tapes of Bach's and Mozart's music, also recordings of the George Carlin performances of which Joe was always a big fan. There were books on the floorboards, front and back, paperback volumes of Shakespeare's plays had been jammed between the dashboard and the windshield, and half-smoked cigars protruded from the ashtray. Joe's means of transportation was a bookmobile. Rather, it was a Joemobile.

I had intended to ask him for a lift as far as Grand Central Station. Instead, I went back upstairs, packed a heavy briefcase, and set off on foot for the nearest subway entrance. ♦

## To the Grand Canyon

by Mark Amorose

Time's massive monument in weathered stone,  
chronicle of the ages of creation,  
you silence tongue and stun imagination:  
your spectator seems doomed to feel alone.  
And in that quietude of isolation  
the tininess of all he calls his own  
(his insignificance of flesh and bone)  
can tempt him to the edge of desperation.

But I defy your mute intimidation,  
for I can count your thousand cubic miles,  
which you, for all your bulk, can't comprehend.  
Nor can you know my final consolation:  
when your enormous ruin lies in piles,  
my mind will loom for ages without end.

# Prosperity

by Clyde Wilson

**DECLINING PROSPERITY** is now a settled fact of American life.

Prosperity is not measured by the day's average of stock speculation, or the profits of bankers, or the munificence of government subsidies and salaries, or the consumption of luxury goods, or even by the Gross Domestic Product. It is amazing how in a few short decades American "educators," "experts," "journalists," and "statesmen" have banished age-old truths from public discourse.

Prosperity is when the great bulk of families have some property and a secure source of living, large or small. When nearly everybody has an abundance of necessities and access to some small luxuries and leisure. Naturally, debt, the ancient nemesis of prosperity, is minimal and temporary in a prosperous society for both government and people—it is a device for emergencies or starting up promising ventures. A prosperous society is made up mostly of people of middling economic status, with relatively few very rich and very poor. The government apparatus is small, unobtrusive, and mainly local. Religion, charity, education, and the arts flourish, especially where there is cultural cohesion, through private patronage. (Cultural cohesion would seem to be typical of societies with widely shared prosperity.)

Americans have been too pretentious in touting our country as *the* land of opportunity. However, it is true that America has been *a* land of opportunity. Not always, of course. There have been stretches of history when it was not true, the most recent of which is now. But as a general proposition "land of opportunity" has had a good deal of accuracy. America has been with some justice thought of as a land where ability and effort counted more than

inherited status, where people could expect to be more prosperous than the previous generations, where, sometimes, the sky was the limit for the enterprising and gifted. A land that was very good, compared with the Europe left behind, for the common man. Frederick Jackson Turner thought that this was because of the great excess of unexploited resources over population, a condition which, he pointed out at the end of the 19th century, was coming to an end.

If I have drawn a proper description of prosperity, there cannot be much disagreement about my opening proposition of decline. A vague sense of this decline is what motivates the people who are joining Tea Parties. When I was a college undergraduate a half-century ago, a professor asked a large class for a show of hands: Who expected to be more prosperous than his parents? There was at least an 85-percent affirmative response rate. I doubt if it would be 20 percent today—even less among native white Americans. Unemployment or underemployment is now the settled lot of millions of people who once would have been solid members of the middle class—even among the skilled and highly skilled. The young remain dependent longer than they used to on the older generation, who were able to accumulate some wealth in better times. Meanwhile, the rich have reached levels of wealth unprecedented in human history and which in themselves are irrefutable proofs of social ill health.

Starting and operating one's own business in America has never been more difficult and less promising than now. You can be sure that that optimistic 20 percent of young folks are not thinking in traditional terms about hard work leading to success. They are thinking that they are smart

enough to get a cut of the going racket. Some of them will be disappointed. And millions of hard-working Americans live on a dangerously small margin of survival. Millions more live off the books in an all-cash economy.

The belief that merit leads to appropriate reward has always been only a partial truth. It does not make allowance for such important considerations as native endowment, luck, circumstances, and connections, and that human beings are more complicated (and more valuable) than mere units of labor. But there has been enough truth in the proposition to serve as an essential factor of social morale. The connection between merit and reward has been largely abolished in American society today, and most people do not believe in it anymore. How, after all, did Michelle Obama, who twice failed the bar exam, merit a quarter-million-dollar salary? And that is only one of countless examples.

The consequences of this loss of social morale could in the long run be more serious than a revolution or world war.

And this, at a time when the eternal global superiority of the American way is proclaimed by presidents and pundits (with incredible ignorance and short-sightedness).

The public discourse (and the "professional" discourse, too) on economics is cursed by the natural proclivity to treat sequences as consequences. If B follows A, then A was the cause of B. In fact, in understanding the wealth of nations, that is a bad assumption—because there are always multiple variables, some of them unknown, unpredictable, too deep to be observed, and even spiritual and unmeasurable.

But this natural tendency is invaluable to politicians (and "experts"). It al-