

## Our love of life, liberty and the pursuit of slovenliness



**FROMA HARROP** tries to imagine the reaction of a neatly brushed, carefully dressed George Washington to his great country's disgusting mob of slobs.

**H**AD George Washington joined me outside a Chili's at Chicago's O'Hare International Airport recently, he would have shuddered at the sight. There, a nation of slobs paraded through the crossroads of America. Frayed denim hems swept the filthy floor. Cleavage poured out of T-shirts bearing vulgar messages. Big bellies flowed over the waists of jeans. Mature women waddled in stained sweat suits. Some passersby stuffed their mouths with pizza as they walked.

Washington was a stickler for good manners, and that included dignified dress. As a youth, he hand-copied a text called "Rules of Civility & Decent Behavior in Company and Conversation." They included: "Wear not your Cloths, foul ... or Dusty but See they be Brush'd once every day at least and take heed that you approach not to any Uncleaness."

Some observers suspect that a collapse in grooming and attention to dress has contributed to the decline in civility on our streets and in our politics. People don't care what they look like in public because they don't care about the public. They have little notion of, or interest in, playing a supportive role in their civilization.

Digital technology has no doubt made many feel divorced from a larger community. Movies that were seen in crowded theaters are privately consumed at home. Socializing happens online. Some may view self-presentation as a pointless concern.

Many dress carefully for important events, such as weddings and funerals. But they regard a planeload of strangers as nobodies for whom they don't have to change out of a sweat shirt. People wear shorts and flip-flops to church.

Some don't even dress up for the most solemn of occasions. Funeral home directors note an increase in visitors perfectly outfitted for a barbecue. The day after Jackie Onassis died, actress Daryl Hannah famously came to her apartment in jeans and T-shirt.

Dress codes have collapsed at all but a handful of upscale restaurants. The proprietors create an atmosphere of elegance and romance only to see it populated by people dressed for mowing a lawn.

As Chicago chef Charlie Trotter told the San Francisco Chronicle a few years ago, "I call it the casualization of America, and it's a grim scene."

New York remains the most formal city, say proprietors of fancy dining establishments, and the degree of dressing-down rises the farther one moves west. This trend hits bottom in some of California's richest enclaves. Hollywood moguls and Silicon Valley tycoons seem to revel in visiting the most expensive locales wearing baseball caps on backward.

Whereas the old Hollywood would pour on the jewels and fine silks to impress, the new Hollywood dresses sloppily to say, "I'm so important, I don't have to make the smallest effort on your behalf."

But do not confuse the jogging pants and dirty sneakers with any interest in making common cause with the masses. The movie stars in the undershirts are nonetheless driving Porsches and living in 20-room mansions. Their wealth is not left in doubt.

A friend in Omaha has noted the phenomenon where young women doll up for a date while the young men with them look like total slobs. It's a sad commentary on modern relationships.

We must concede that this is a big country with different expectations for proper attire. One person's ostentation may be another's good manners. But a modicum of care in dress and grooming would seem a basic minimum just about everywhere — or it used to be. Cowboys might get muddy on the job, but they were clean and pressed for the Saturday-night dance.

It seems that the richer this country gets, the more slovenly people have become. It's a grim scene all right.

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## In new federal legislation, a victory for cybersecurity

■ Bill sails through House with bipartisan support

By CHRIS BRONK

**I**T'S not every day that we hear that a bill regarding a major issue of great importance to American industry, society and national security has sailed through the House of Representatives with overwhelming bipartisan support, but that's exactly what happened earlier this month with passage of House Resolution 4061, the Cybersecurity Enhancement Act of 2009. Sponsored by Rep. Daniel Lipinski, D-Ill., and nine others, including the representative for Texas' 10th District, Michael McCaul, the bill represents a concrete set of steps that government can use to confront the threat that Director of National Intelligence Dennis Blair chose to lead off with in his annual intelligence briefing on Capitol Hill last month.

This is not the first major legislation proposed on the cybersecurity issue. Last April 1, Sens. Jay Rockefeller, D-W.Va., and Olympia Snowe, R-Maine, delivered their own blueprint for cybersecurity. Coinciding the introduction of their bill with the activation date of the much-hyped Conficker Internet attack, their initiative withered on the vine. Conficker, while still a real threat, was essentially a bust and left those who gave the gravest warnings about it looking like April fools.

Also, provisions of the Rockefeller-Snowe bill, which would have permitted the federal government to take control over or shut down computer networks, including parts of the Internet, in times of crisis, was viewed by Internet service providers and just about anyone else relying on a large computer network to do their business as government overstepping its bounds. The telecoms and Silicon Valley argued, and rightly so, that recovering from a cyberattack was not a job in which the federal government should step in and exert its control, but rather a more nuanced process where industry and government work together to sort out the mess.

What the House of Representatives has gotten right is to begin assembly of a piecemeal strategy to develop our capabilities over time. This is legislation that accepts that there is no silver bullet or broad act of government that will solve the problem overnight. It provides funding for the training of technology workers who will pay off their educations in national service. It brings together universities, the country's rich resource and development resource pool and industry, funds them and thereby creates a pipeline from the labs to the desktop, the BlackBerry and beyond. Most important, it tasks civilian agencies, including the National Science Foundation and the

Department of Commerce's National Institute for Standards and Technology, with delivering solutions to the cyberproblem. Moving forward, we will need to embrace such thinking as most of what constitutes cybersecurity is not cyberwarfare and therefore does not fall within the purview of the Defense Department.

For those here in Houston who may argue that this is a problem for the bureaucrats in Washington or the techies on the West Coast, that is simply not the case. This threat is real. It is real to my daughter's preschool teacher, who awoke one recent morning to find herself locked out of her e-mail. She heard from friends that someone had hijacked her Facebook account. Cleaning up the mess, she must now worry about the integrity of her online accounts, credit rating and identity, while every step of the way proving again and again that she is who she says she is.

The threat is also real to our energy industry. We are in the process of a revolutionary overhaul in the way we produce, buy and consume electricity: the "smart grid." Smart grid will allow us to confront our energy dependency issues by bringing the same sorts of IT-delivered efficiencies to the electricity business that have allowed retailers like Walmart to manage their supply chain and inventory to enormous profitability. What is risky is that the smart grid will connect the electrical grid's supervisory control and data acquisition (SCADA) systems to wired and wireless networks, including the Internet. While my colleagues and I argued here last spring that we had little to worry about regarding a cyberattack against the electricity grid as it is currently configured (Houston Chronicle, "Is U.S. vulnerable to a cyber attack?" Page B10, May 3), connecting SCADA to the Internet will change that.

A number of good things have happened on the cybersecurity issue in the past few months. President Barack Obama has chosen to tap a leading cybersecurity thinker and doer, Howard Schmidt, to serve as his top adviser on the issue. Google has very publicly pointed the finger at those attempting to steal its intellectual property and is working with the State Department and National Security Agency in what one diplomat called "21st-century gunboat diplomacy." We are even talking about cyber arms control with the Russians.

Cybersecurity is now approaching where it ought to be on the national agenda. Now the same needs to be said of every Fortune 500 company's boardroom, including those with headquarters here in Houston.

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## 'Tea party' movement has a signature radicalism



**E.J. DIONNE JR.** says that, like the anti-federalists long before them, today's 'tea partiers' simply don't believe in the central government, period.

**W**ASHINGTON — So what exactly is the "tea party" movement, and why has it risen up?

The ferocity of its opposition to President Barack Obama is mystifying to political progressives. Most of the left simply doesn't see the current occupant of the White House as especially liberal, let alone "socialist."

Obama, after all, is the man who saved the banks and the capital markets. Now the bankers are secure, and most of them are still rich.

His health care proposals stopped far short of the single-payer system that so many liberals have long sought, and his plan is the kind of thing moderate Republicans offered back when they were a significant force. Obama put absolutely no political muscle behind the progressives' backup idea, a public option that could have served as a beachhead for a single-payer system.

The president is also decidedly moderate on budget questions. His stimulus plan was,

if anything, too small. And Obama endorsed a bipartisan commission to reach a deal on deficit reduction, an idea that originated with centrist Democrats and moderately conservative Republicans — and that most liberals opposed.

Why has this middle-of-the-road leader inspired such enthusiastic counterorganizing and called forth such venom?

The most popular theory on the left is that Obama's race is a big part of the story and that we are seeing a reaction among some whites against the multiracial, multicultural political coalition he has brought together. The phrase "losing our country" is often on the lips of his enemies, which raises the question of whom they mean by the word "our."

At last week's Tea Party Convention, former Rep. Tom Tancredo, famed for his attacks on illegal immigration, gave backers of the racial explanation all the ammunition they needed.

In an astonishingly offensive speech, cheered by the Tea Party crowd, Tancredo de-

clared that "people who could not even spell the word 'vote' or say it in English put a committed socialist ideology in the White House. His name is Barack Hussein Obama."

Even worse, if that's possible, Tancredo harkened back to the Jim Crow South that denied the right to vote to African-Americans on the basis of "literacy tests" that called for potential black registrants to answer questions that would have stumped Ph.D.s in political science.

The reason we elected "Barack Hussein Obama," according to Tancredo, is "mostly because I think that we do not have a civics literacy test before people can vote in this country."

Where is the party of Abraham Lincoln? The GOP's leaders have been shockingly silent, but Meghan McCain, John McCain's daughter, honorably stepped up to condemn Tancredo. On ABC's *The View*, she said the call for literacy tests amounted to "innate racism."

So, yes, parts of this movement do seem to be motivated by a new nativism and by racism. But it would be a mistake to see the hostility to Obama only in terms of race.

Something else is going on in the tea party movement, and it has deep roots in our history. Anti-statism, a profound mistrust of power in Washington, goes all the way back to the anti-federalists who opposed the Constitution itself because they saw it concentrating too much authority in the central government.

At any given time, perhaps 20 percent to 25 percent of Americans can be counted on to denounce anything Washington does as a threat to "our traditional liberties."

This suspicion of government is not amenable to "facts" — not because it is irrational but because the facts are beside the point. For the anti-statists, opposing government power is a matter of principle.

If those who think this way are asked whether an economic collapse would have been better than passing a stimulus and bailing out the banks, the anti-statists typically say "yes," even if they might also challenge the premise of the question.

The purest expression of this disposition has come from Rep. Ron Paul, the libertarian Republican from Texas. In 2008, Paul strenuously criticized President Bush's proposed bank bailout for "propping up a failed system so the agony lasts longer." Without a bailout, Paul conceded, "It would be a bad year. But, this way, it's going to be a bad decade."

Understanding the principled anti-government radicalism that animates this movement explains why its partisans see the conservative Bush as a sellout and the cautiously liberal Obama as a socialist. For now, their fears of Obama are enough to tether the tea partiers to the GOP. In the long run, establishment Republicans are destined to disappoint them.

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