

SNYDER'R'US

By Michael Ventura

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In *The Four-Gated City*, Doris Lessing wrote: “In any situation anywhere there is always a key fact, an essence. But it is usually every other fact, thousands of facts, that are seen, discussed, dealt with. The central fact is usually ignored, or not seen.”

A central fact stirs little debate but sets the terms of our days.

I had to go to Snyder, Texas, to see the full force of the central fact of our present-day USA. Snyder slammed me with the obvious – the situation that we see without seeing, a bondage so complete we take it for granted.

Snyder sits at the base of the Texas Panhandle where U.S. 180 crosses U.S. 84, a scraggly outpost of a town in oil country that some call desert and some call chaparral. At the city limit, a sign claims a population of 12,000.

I came to Snyder for my health. Doctor’s orders: After two hours of driving, stop for 45 minutes. It had been about two hours since Brownwood, maybe somewhat more. Snyder was handy. I’d not been before.

Snyder is a stark town -- stark in its dullness. Nothing stands out. But look for a local joint to sit for a time, read, eat a late lunch, and one thing suddenly, grimly, does stand out: There is no “local” here. Not hardly.

Searching for an eatery that might serve a passable meal, as I drove around I saw only Whataburger, Chicken Express, Dairy Queen, Subway, Long John Silver’s, MacDonald’s, Burger King, Pizza Hut, Sonic, Taco Bell – and other chains, nothing but chains: Walmart, of course, and Dollar General, Allsup’s, O’Reilly Auto Parts, Aaron’s, Ace Hardware. You see them everywhere; we’re used that, but in Snyder, it’s almost all you see.

There are local nail salons, donut shops, tattoo parlors, and I did finally find a locally owned eatery that I will not dishonor by naming. I walked in. It didn’t smell right. I stayed anyway. The featured dessert, about which my waitress gushed: fried cheesecake.

Sitting at that booth, looking out that window, I got hit with the force of a revelation: This is not a small city in a free country. This place is a colony.

Here is what happens in a colony: An occupying power sucks the colony’s resources dry for purposes that give no benefit to the colony. The colony’s self-government is, for all intents and purposes, appointed by the occupiers; its dissenting voices are marginalized (or worse); the constabulary serves the colonizers; the peoples’ taxes are siphoned off one way or another by the colonizing power; and the colonizers write the laws. Every choice presented to the people is false – six of one, half a dozen of the other. Everything the people do commercially – how they make money and how they spend it – benefits the colonizers, represented here by the massive chain stores and acres of oil rigs swooshing practically all Snyder’s money up into a financial system that has nothing to do with these people – a financial system run by and for manipulators, whom even *The New York Times* now calls oligarchs.

Snyder is a people-farm. A farm run by Oligarchy with a capital O.

Dig it, the patterns goes like this:

* Employ people in mass entities (Walmart, MacDonald’s) that exist now

only for the purpose of moving the elements on which the financial system rests – the goods, services, and resources that are the excuse for the stocks, bonds, and speculative enterprises that make the really big money.

* Pay the majority of employees just enough to function as they move your necessary elements, while you indenture them through a system of credit that they are taught is beneficial. Debt is the key to keeping them in their place -- anxious, insecure, without obvious means to change anything.

* Gradually arrange things so that almost all the money you pay them is returned to the Oligarchy through one or another of their shopping and financial choices. (The people buy more cheaply than was possible in classic entrepreneurial capitalism, but their money leaves town. In entrepreneurial capitalism, the idea is that money spent on basic goods, services, and resources ultimately benefited the community as a whole; in oligarchic capitalism, money disappears. Oligarchy is a system by which all money is sucked from the bottom up to the top 10%, 1%, and .01%. It is not reinvested in any community.)

* Everything gets cheaper except what is absolutely needed: food, shelter, transportation, education, health care, and the cost of election to positions of power. Those prices inflate wildly, without pause and without reason.

* Vote for Republicans, and you get a Walmart government: Workers are treated brutally, all the money disappears, and the people have no say. Vote for Democrats, you get a Target government: Workers are treated better, almost all the money disappears, and, at the end of the day, little changes.

So much for Snyder -- pathetic, instructive Snyder, a town so small and stark that it shrieks out how now, in this USA, Oligarchy is all there is.

It's obvious that Snyder is a colony. It's not so obvious in larger oligarchic colonies like Austin, New York City, Los Angeles, or Lubbock, Texas.

In large oligarchic colonies, there are many locally owned establishments. This creates an illusion of autonomy. But, in relation to the whole, the locally owned can rarely muster economic and political power. Cannot, for instance, control overall development, real estate, rentals, and boondoggles; cannot stand effectively for or against local or federal government projects; cannot match political super-PAC monies; and all locally owned entities are subject to speculative finance-industry whims utterly beyond their control.

Not only do local entities not represent the polity's economy, but, no matter where you live, most people do their shopping (and many do their eating) at the same outlets you find in Snyder. They bank with the same banks. Their money is swooshed away in the same fashion. Bigger cities look better because of fatter tax bases and more tourist cash, but the basic dynamic is exactly the same.

To borrow from Edna St. Vincent Millay's usage: Ah, my foes, and oh, my friends, you may not think you live in Snyder, Texas, but you really do. And exactly that (thank you, Doris Lessing), is the obvious, the central fact, the phenomenon that everybody knows without actually noticing, the fact that stirs little debate or discussion but nevertheless sets the terms of our days.

The entire economic function of we colonials is to empty our resources into the coffers of Oligarchy, indentured through a credit system on which we, with eyes wide shut, have come to depend.

Want to see what's really going on? Google "snyder tx courthouse photo." Double-click the image at bottom right. That amazing, sinister, windowless, futuristic, *Hunger Games*-like structure is the Snyder courthouse. No UFO could be farther from the spirit of the terrain and the temper of the people than that supremely ugly, yet somehow graceful and incredibly confident building. You want to see the face of Oligarchy? You're shit out of luck. It has no face. But it has a building. Contemplate that building, and you'll see what you're up against – if, that is, you choose to be against it.

Let's face it, most of you will go placidly along, mouthing any dodge that relieves you of responsibility for your role in history. (I don't mean to be nasty, but true is true.) For the few of you, the problem is how to address this. I don't know the second step, but I know the first: Speak of it as what it is. Goddammit, speak of it. Speak of it as what it is. It is Oligarchy.

As for the go-alongs: Console yourself all you like and all you can stand. "But Austin has so many pleasant food venues." "But there's oh so much to do in New York." Whistle in your darkness all you please. We have been colonized.

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