

»» A SLICE OF SIMPLICITY

Henry David Thoreau said: "Simplify. Simplify. Simplify." But simplicity

is not about frugality or an obsession with cutting corners. It's not about learning to live without. It's about learning to live *without excess*. Do we really need another pair of shoes or sports channel or upgraded iPod?

1 At your next youth group gathering, give kids each a piece of paper and ask them to finish this sentence: "I have enough..." They might write *shoes, clothing, CDs, electronic gadgets, computer games...* whatever. Then decide on a day when everyone can go through their "enough" items and decrease them by some agreed-upon percentage (25 or 50 percent?). Afterward, when you're all back together, ask: "What does God want us to do with all these luxuries?"

2 Teach kids to ask themselves this question all the time: "Do I really need this?" Better yet, challenge them to call a friend before they make any major purchase, just to get input on the question. So they see that the electronics store is having a sale and they first call a friend to ask: "What do you think: Do I really need this?" They can talk it over, take it to God, and then follow their heart.

3 Maybe the Big Night Out event can morph into a Big Night In event. Why spend the money? Why contribute to the chaos? Every once in a while surprise your kids with a Make-Up-Our-Own-Games night or a Weirdest Old Board Game night or an Old Kung Fu Movie night. Take life down to a 7 instead of trying to live at 11.

Simplicity can lead to generosity, self-discovery, and purpose—a slice of simplicity allows us to see each other and our world without clutter.

An end to America's era of dominance?

Sebastian Mallaby
The Washington Post

"It's not exactly morning in America," said Sebastian Mallaby in *The Washington Post*. A quarter-century after Ronald Reagan celebrated the resurgence of a strong U.S., American power has hit bottom. The American military—the world's mightiest—cannot put down the insurgency in Iraq, where "the old remedy of extra troops now seems tragically futile." In Afghanistan, warlords and the Taliban are staging a comeback. On the diplomatic front, the U.S. has failed to stop North Korea's nuclear test and Iran's uranium enrichment. "Everyone accepts that there's not much the West can do about this." At home, politicians on both the left and the right are unwilling to address the country's most serious problems—entitlement programs that will break the budget when baby boomers retire, global warming, and our dependency on foreign oil. The American era may not be nearing its end, "but has there been a worse moment for American power?"

Censoring the war in Iraq

Michael Yon
The Weekly Standard

"How are our troops doing in Iraq?" asked Michael Yon in *The Weekly Standard*. "Who knows?" Some 150,000 brave Americans put their lives on the line every day in Iraq. They might as well be on the moon. Currently, only nine reporters—only two of them working for the domestic U.S. media—are embedded with our soldiers, compared to 770 during the initial invasion. While the press deserves some blame for this scandalous blackout, the biggest culprit is the military, which creates so many ridiculous hurdles for journalists willing to venture outside the protected Green Zone that it amounts to "censorship." The Pentagon, obviously, doesn't trust the press, especially in a war about which much of the news is bad. But refusing to let reporters cover the actual fighting does a disservice to the troops. The American people also deserve to know what's happening on the ground; the war is being fought with their taxes, and their sons and daughters. "The government has no right to withhold information or to deny access to our combat forces just because that information might anger, frighten, or disturb us."

Welfare reform: Mission not accomplished

Amy L. Wax
Los Angeles Times

The end of welfare as we know it? Not quite, said Amy L. Wax in the *Los Angeles Times*. This fall marks the 10th anniversary of Bill Clinton's welfare reform law, hailed by many as a grand success. It isn't. True, the 1996 law has reduced welfare rolls, put most recipients to work, and limited how long they can receive public assistance. But welfare reform was also supposed "to reverse the decades-long decline in the American nuclear family." By that measure, it has been "an abysmal failure." Today, more than a third of all children born to women with a high school degree or less are illegitimate; in the African-American community, a stunning 70 percent of all births are out of wedlock. These children will almost certainly wind up poor, with their mothers unable to earn enough to support them without public assistance. Welfare rules, in fact, still reward single women for having children. Men can still qualify their offspring for aid by abandoning them. As long as the law encourages illegitimacy, millions of children will be deprived of caring fathers, "stable homes, and orderly lives"—and the cycle of poverty and dependency will continue.

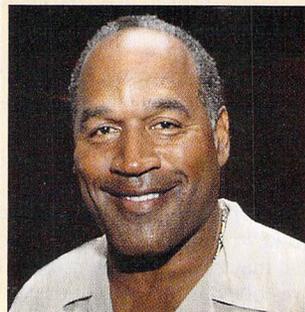
Why states really hate online casinos

Froma Harrop
The Providence Journal

Proponents of a new federal law aimed at Internet gambling pretend to be moral crusaders, said Froma Harrop in *The Providence Journal*. In reality, they're simply trying to protect their states' casinos and lotteries from competition. The main sponsor of the Unlawful Internet Gambling Enforcement Act is Republican Rep. Jim Leach of Iowa, who said the law would keep offshore Web sites from preying on poor gambling addicts. His concern would be moving, except that Iowa happens to be the home of 13 casinos, and three "racinos"—horse- or dog-racing tracks that also offer slot machines. The state gets about \$300 million a year in tax revenues from these gambling operations, and another \$81 million in lottery revenues. But the new federal law won't keep the Internet casinos from horning in on Iowa's action. It prohibits U.S. banks and credit card companies from making financial transactions with the offshore gambling sites—but since billions of dollars are at stake, you can bet that new, offshore credit card companies will rise to meet the demand. Someday, in fact, Internet gambling might become so successful that it will put casinos and lotteries out of business. Perhaps then, state governments would raise revenues "with honest taxation," instead of "milking their most vulnerable and naive residents through games of chance."

It must be true ... I read it in the tabloids

■ A Croatian woman had electricity and fire shoot from her rectum when she was struck by lightning while brushing her teeth. Natasha Timarovic says she had "just put my mouth under the tap" when a bolt came in an open window and struck her. "I don't remember much after that." A doctor blamed Timarovic's choice of footwear. "She was wearing rubber bathroom shoes, so instead of earthing through her feet, the electricity shot out of her backside."



O.J.: Speaking hypothetically ...

■ O.J. Simpson is ready to confess, says *The National Enquirer*. The former football great is being paid \$3.5 million to write a book with the working title *If I Did It*, in which he explains how he might have committed the 1994 murders of his ex-wife Nicole and her friend Ron Goldman. Simpson says that a friend with a knife might have accompanied him to the scene, that he might have grabbed the knife when he saw his ex and Goldman, and that he might suddenly have found himself looking down at their bloodied bodies. Simpson writes that this part of the book is hypothetical, says a source. "But I don't think anybody is going to be convinced by that."

■ A British woman is taking revenge on her cheating husband by auctioning off all his clothing on eBay. The unnamed woman has set no price on the "dirty little weasel's" wardrobe, but says in her listing that she will accept "a decent single man" in lieu of cash. The clothing is not in perfect condition, the seller concedes. "Some of these items might be slightly damp due to them having been chucked out of the bedroom window and sitting in the garden for a bit."

The ways of the Amish

A deranged gunman's recent killings of five little girls at an Amish school in Pennsylvania were viewed not just as a human tragedy, but also as a horrific clash of cultures. Are the Amish as unworldly as they seem?

Where did the Amish originate?

They belonged initially to the Mennonite Church, part of the Anabaptist movement of 16th-century Protestants who felt the reforms of Martin Luther and Ulrich Zwingli didn't bring Christianity back far enough to its scriptural roots. Then in 1693, a Swiss Mennonite bishop, Jacob Amman, broke away from the Mennonites, feeling that they, too, were backsliding. The first Amish began migrating from Europe in the early 18th century, to avoid persecution and compulsory military service. Some 200,000 live in the U.S. today, most in Pennsylvania, Indiana, and Ohio.

What do the Amish believe?

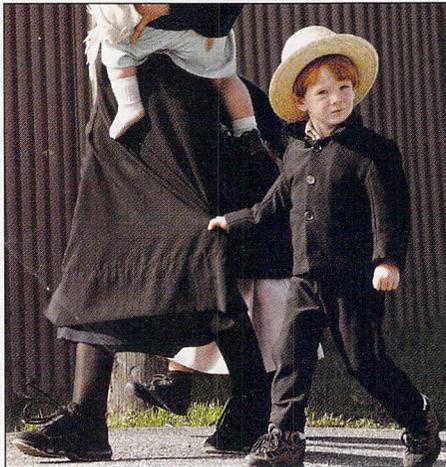
Like most Anabaptists, they adopt a literal interpretation of the Bible, emphasizing passages—e.g., “Be not yoked with unbelievers” (II Corinthians 6:14) and “Be ye not conformed to this world” (Romans 12:2)—calling for a separation of true believers from the outside world. Two key concepts are their rejection of *hochmut* (pride) and the high value they place on *demut* (humility) and *gelassenheit* (submission). Wives obey husbands; children obey parents; all submit to the will of God. Their reluctance to assert their individuality puts them directly at odds with America's culture of competition and self-fulfillment.

What sort of practices do they follow?

Plainness is a key virtue. (“I think you are the plainest woman I know,” is a compliment.) They dress in homemade clothes, the women in gray cotton dresses, hair severely pulled back under bonnets, the men in black felt hats, black trousers, blue or white shirts, and suspenders. When an Amish man marries, he grows a beard, but not a moustache, which is considered too “military.” They educate their children until 15, believing further education might awaken materialistic ambitions. They reject technologies such as telephones that might inhibit direct interaction; the Internet is banned. They use tractors to transport machinery, but not in the fields, where mule-drawn plows are the norm. The favored mode of transport is the horse-drawn buggy. As pacifists, they don't join the military; nor do they collect Social Security. The parents of the children shot on Oct. 2 refused police offers to be flown to the hospitals where their daughters had been taken, since flying is against the *ordnung*—rules drawn up by the elders that govern behavior.

Do all follow the same rules?

No. Since the 19th century, Amish fellowships have divided over the interpretation of Romans 12:2—“Be ye not conformed to this world.” In recent years, that has brought splits over the use of mechanized farm equipment and large cooling tanks for milk. At the liberal extreme, the “black bumper” Beachy Amish drive chromeless cars and are rejected as non-Amish by the others. At the conservative



An Amish family at one of the girls' funerals

Timothy A. Clary/AP/Getty Images

end, fellowships disagree violently over the number of pleats there should be in a bonnet, the width of a hat brim, or whether rubber tires should be allowed on buggies. Groups with similar policies are held to be “in fellowship,” and they can visit and even marry among one another. But minor disagreements over, say, phones, can create more splinter fellowships.

Do they mix with outsiders?

No. They deliberately keep separate. They are polite to the “English” (as they refer to non-Amish Americans), but discourage social interaction. Most speak a distinctive High German dialect they call *Deitsch*. Since almost all current Amish descend from the same few hundred founders in the 18th century, they're particularly susceptible

to hereditary genetic disorders, including dwarfism, and have the highest incidence of twins of any population.

How do they deal with crime?

Their approach is to keep it quiet and deal with it themselves. Most disciplinary problems are dealt with as internal matters, with punishment—usually a period of excommunication or “shunning”—set by church elders. And there's scant recourse for those who feel their case has been ignored. One Amish woman, raped more than 100 times by her brothers, had to quit the Amish community in order to have them prosecuted. The Amish are often accused of being too lenient with cases of child abuse and incest. On the plus side, crime is rare, and divorce and teenage pregnancy almost unknown. The incidence of depression is very low.

Can they continue to live an 18th-century existence?

It's wrong to think the Amish live as their forefathers did. Though they may not have phones in their homes, many get around the *ordnung* by keeping phones in outside sheds. They don't own cars, but will gladly ride in one, or hire cars with drivers. Nor do they all still work the land. Some work in factories; others turn to tourism, cashing in on the public fascination with their sect. There are Quilters' Heritage weekends, Old-Fashioned Ice-Cream Festivals, even an Amish Country Craze Golf Course. The village of Intercourse, Pa., is now a theme park where Amish dolls, candy, and even fridge magnets are sold. However, for some Amish, the resulting culture clash has proved a disaster (see box).

Do the Amish have a future?

Yes. The Amish do not proselytize, but nor do they practice contraception, so families tend to be large: Most Amish families have 11 or 12 children, some many more. As a result, their population doubles every 20 years. By the middle of this century, the Amish population could be as high as 1 million.

The dangers of rumspringa

In 1998, the Amish community was shattered when two young Amish men were arrested for selling cocaine to other young Amish at the “hoedowns” run every week for Amish youth groups. The men had been working on construction sites far from their communities during the Amish rite of passage called *rumspringa*. Literally a “running around,” *rumspringa* is the period from age 16 to the early 20s when Amish boys and girls are encouraged to explore the “English” world, before deciding whether to commit to an Amish life. A generation ago, *rumspringa* was simply a time when parents looked the other way as young couples courted. Now many young Amish can taste the freedoms of dating, parties, drinking, driving, and wearing jeans. For people whose lives have consisted almost entirely of chores, early bedtimes, and rigid rules, exploring the world of sex, drugs, and gangsta rap can induce enormous stresses. Some find themselves out of their depth, but many Amish argue that the problems have been greatly exaggerated and that 80 percent to 90 percent of young people who experience *rumspringa* return to the fold.