

Chapter 1 : Letters of H L Mencken

By SAVANT As Rouen in France celebrates diversity by way of the murder of a [].

Beliefs[edit] In his capacity as editor, Mencken became close friends with the leading literary figures of his time, including Theodore Dreiser , F. He also championed artists whose works he considered worthy. For example, he asserted that books such as *Caught Short!* He also mentored John Fante. Hirshberg , he wrote a series of articles and in most of a book about the care of babies. His humor and satire owe much to Ambrose Bierce and Mark Twain. He did much to defend Dreiser despite freely admitting his faults, including stating forthrightly that Dreiser often wrote badly and was a gullible man. Hornbeck right , seen here as played by Gene Kelly in the Hollywood film version. These hucksters pose now as earnest fundraisers for temperance "who get drunk on the proceeds; as pious "saved" men collecting money for a far off evangelistic mission"to pirates on the high seas; and as learned doctors of phrenology , although they can barely spell. In the end the townsfolk wise up, and the scoundrels are ridden out on a rail. For Mencken the episode epitomizes the hilarious dark side of America, where democracy, as defined by Mencken, is "the worship of jackals by jackasses. A noted curmudgeon, [29] democratic in subjects attacked, Mencken savaged politics, [30] hypocrisy, and social convention. As a frank admirer of Nietzsche, Mencken was a detractor of populism and representative democracy , which he believed was a system in which inferior men dominated their superiors. The play *Inherit the Wind* is a fictionalized version of the trial, and, as noted above, the cynical reporter E. Hornbeck is based on Mencken. In , he deliberately had himself arrested for selling an issue of *The American Mercury* that was banned in Boston under the Comstock laws. She was accused of faking her reported kidnapping and the case attracted national attention. There was every expectation Mencken would continue his previous pattern of anti-fundamentalist articles, this time with a searing critique of McPherson. Unexpectedly, he came to her defense, identifying various local religious and civic groups which were using the case as an opportunity to pursue their respective ideological agendas against the embattled Pentecostal minister. After all charges had been dropped against McPherson, Mencken revisited the case in with a sarcastically biting and observant article. Mencken, says Charles A. He believed that every community produced a few people of clear superiority. He considered groupings on a par with hierarchies, which led to a kind of natural elitism and natural aristocracy. Mencken said, "There is no other Jew in Baltimore who seems suitable," according to the article. The diary also quoted him as saying of blacks, in September , that "it is impossible to talk anything resembling discretion or judgment to a colored woman. They are all essentially child-like, and even hard experience does not teach them anything. For example, he had this to say about a Maryland incident: Not a single bigwig came forward in the emergency, though the whole town knew what was afoot. Any one of a score of such bigwigs might have halted the crime, if only by threatening to denounce its perpetrators, but none spoke. So Williams was duly hanged, burned and mutilated. I admit freely enough that, by careful breeding, supervision of environment and education, extending over many generations, it might be possible to make an appreciable improvement in the stock of the American Negro, for example, but I must maintain that this enterprise would be a ridiculous waste of energy, for there is a high-caste white stock ready at hand, and it is inconceivable that the Negro stock, however carefully it might be nurtured, could ever even remotely approach it. The educated Negro of today is a failure, not because he meets insuperable difficulties in life, but because he is a Negro. He is, in brief, a low-caste man, to the manner born, and he will remain inert and inefficient until fifty generations of him have lived in civilization. And even then, the superior white race will be fifty generations ahead of him. Democracy gives [the beatification of mediocrity] a certain appearance of objective and demonstrable truth. The mob man, functioning as citizen, gets a feeling that he is really important to the world"that he is genuinely running things. Out of his maudlin herding after rogues and mountebanks there comes to him a sense of vast and mysterious power"which is what makes archbishops, police sergeants, the grand goblins of the Ku Klux and other such magnificoes happy. And out of it there comes, too, a conviction that he is somehow wise, that his views are taken seriously by his betters"which is what makes United States Senators, fortune tellers and Young Intellectuals happy. Finally,

there comes out of it a glowing consciousness of a high duty triumphantly done which is what makes hangmen and husbands happy. The larger the mob, the harder the test. In small areas, before small electorates, a first-rate man occasionally fights his way through, carrying even the mob with him by force of his personality. But when the field is nationwide, and the fight must be waged chiefly at second and third hand, and the force of personality cannot so readily make itself felt, then all the odds are on the man who is, intrinsically, the most devious and mediocre—the man who can most easily adeptly disperse the notion that his mind is a virtual vacuum. The Presidency tends, year by year, to go to such men. As democracy is perfected, the office represents, more and more closely, the inner soul of the people. We move toward a lofty ideal. The rest is baloney. All of our sciences still suffer from their former attachment to religion, and that is why there is so much metaphysics and astrology, the two are the same, in science. Peirce in the American Mercury. He said mathematics is simply a fiction, compared with individual facts that make up science. The human mind, at its present stage of development, cannot function without the aid of fictions, but neither can it function without the aid of facts—save, perhaps, when it is housed in the skull of a university professor of philosophy. Of the two, the facts are enormously the more important. In certain metaphysical fields, e. Very few fictions remain in use in anatomy, or in plumbing and gas-fitting; they have even begun to disappear from economics. According to Mencken, mathematics is necessarily infected with metaphysics because of the tendency of many mathematical people to engage in metaphysical speculation. In a review for A. Mencken also uses the term "theology" more generally, to refer to the use of logic in science or any other field of knowledge. In a review for both A. Is there anything in the general thinking of theologians which makes their opinion on the point of any interest or value? What have they ever done in other fields to match the fact-finding of the biologists? I can find nothing in the record. Their processes of thought, taking one day with another, are so defective as to be preposterous. True enough, they are masters of logic, but they always start out from palpably false premises. Instead of mathematical "speculation" such as quantum theory, Mencken believed physicists should just directly look at individual facts in the laboratory like chemists: If chemists were similarly given to fanciful and mystical guessing, they would have hatched a quantum theory forty years ago to account for the variations that they observed in atomic weights. But they kept on plugging away in their laboratories without calling in either mathematicians or theologians to aid them, and eventually they discovered the isotopes, and what had been chaos was reduced to the most exact sort of order. Physicists and especially astronomers are consequently not real scientists, because when looking at shapes or forces, they do not simply "patiently wait for further light", but resort to mathematical theory. There is no need for statistics in scientific physics, since one should simply look at the facts while statistics attempts to construct mathematical models. On the other hand, the really competent physicists do not bother with the "theology" or reasoning of mathematical theories such as in quantum mechanics: Some of the notions which they now try to foist upon the world, especially in the astronomical realm and about the atom, are obviously nonsensical, and will soon go the way of all unsupported speculations. But there is nothing intrinsically insoluble about the problems they mainly struggle with, and soon or late really competent physicists will arise to solve them. These really competent physicists, I predict, will be too busy in their laboratories to give any time to either metaphysics or theology. Both are eternal enemies of every variety of sound thinking, and no man can traffic with them without losing something of his good judgment. It is a well known fact that physicists are greatly given to the supernatural. One of the most absurd of all spiritualists is Sir Oliver Lodge. I have the suspicion that the cause may be that physics itself, as currently practised, is largely moonshine. Certainly there is a great deal of highly dubious stuff in the work of such men as Eddington. The Jews could be put down very plausibly as the most unpleasant race ever heard of. As commonly encountered, they lack many of the qualities that mark the civilized man: They have vanity without pride, voluptuousness without taste, and learning without wisdom. Their fortitude, such as it is, is wasted upon puerile objects, and their charity is mainly a form of display. Far from being an anti-Semite, Mencken was one of the first journalists to denounce the persecution of the Jews in Germany at a time when The New York Times, say, was notoriously reticent. On November 27, , Mencken writes Baltimore Sun, "It is to be hoped that the poor Jews now being robbed and mauled in Germany will not take too seriously the plans of various politicians to rescue them. There is only one way to help the fugitives, and that is to find

places for them in a country in which they can really live. The City of Baltimore acquired the property in , and the H. Mencken House became part of the City Life Museums. It has been closed to general admission since , but is opened for special events and group visits by arrangement. At his death, it was in possession of most of the present large collection. The original third floor H. Mencken Room and Collection housing this collection was dedicated on April 17, In , Johns Hopkins acquired "nearly 6, books, photographs and letters by and about Mencken" from "the estate of an Ohio accountant.

Chapter 2 : 'My Plan Is to Let People Do Whatever They Please' - blog.quintoapp.com

Rodgers probably has more information on Mencken's not-quite 5 year marriage to Sara Haardt than any other biographer to date and does well in fleshing out a good portrait of Mrs. Mencken for us. This is a good HLM biography but IMHO the best still is "Mencken, a Life" by Fred Hobson.

Mencken wrote on the trial. Knopf, , the last two revisions being slight. Mencken added "My adventures as a newspaper correspondent at the Scopes trial are told in my Newspaper Days, New York, It is common to assume that human progress affects everyone -- that even the dullest man, in these bright days, knows more than any man of, say, the Eighteenth Century, and is far more civilized. This assumption is quite erroneous. The men of the educated minority, no doubt, know more than their predecessors, and of some of them, perhaps, it may be said that they are more civilized -- though I should not like to be put to giving names -- but the great masses of men, even in this inspired republic, are precisely where the mob was at the dawn of history. They are ignorant, they are dishonest, they are cowardly, they are ignoble. They know little if anything that is worth knowing, and there is not the slightest sign of a natural desire among them to increase their knowledge. Such immortal vermin, true enough, get their share of the fruits of human progress, and so they may be said, in a way, to have their part in it. The most ignorant man, when he is ill, may enjoy whatever boons and usufructs modern medicine may offer -- that is, provided he is too poor to choose his own doctor. He is free, if he wants to, to take a bath. The literature of the world is at his disposal in public libraries. He may look at works of art. He may hear good music. He has at hand a thousand devices for making life less wearisome and more tolerable: But he had no more to do with bringing these things into the world than the horned cattle in the fields, and he does no more to increase them today than the birds of the air. On the contrary, he is generally against them, and sometimes with immense violence. Every step in human progress, from the first feeble stirrings in the abyss of time, has been opposed by the great majority of men. They have fought every new truth ever heard of, and they have killed every truth-seeker who got into their hands. II The so-called religious organizations which now lead the war against the teaching of evolution are nothing more, at bottom, than conspiracies of the inferior man against his betters. They mirror very accurately his congenital hatred of knowledge, his bitter enmity to the man who knows more than he does, and so gets more out of life. Certainly it cannot have gone unnoticed that their membership is recruited, in the overwhelming main, from the lower orders -- that no man of any education or other human dignity belongs to them. What they propose to do, at bottom and in brief, is to make the superior man infamous -- by mere abuse if it is sufficient, and if it is not, then by law. Such organizations, of course, must have leaders; there must be men in them whose ignorance and imbecility are measurably less abject than the ignorance and imbecility of the average. These super-Chandala often attain to a considerable power, especially in democratic states. Their followers trust them and look up to them; sometimes, when the pack is on the loose, it is necessary to conciliate them. But their puissance cannot conceal their incurable inferiority. Whatever lies above the level of their comprehension is of the devil. A glass of wine delights civilized men; they themselves, drinking it, would get drunk. Ergo, wine must be prohibited. Ergo, its teaching must be put down. This simple fact explains such phenomena as the Tennessee buffoonery. We must think of human progress, not as of something going on in the race in general, but as of something going on in a small minority, perpetually beleaguered in a few walled towns. Now and then the horde of barbarians outside breaks through, and we have an armed effort to halt the process. The minority is decimated and driven to cover. But a few survive -- and a few are enough to carry on. He hates it because it is complex -- because it puts an unbearable burden upon his meager capacity for taking in ideas. Thus his search is always for short cuts. All superstitions are such short cuts. Their aim is to make the unintelligible simple, and even obvious. So on what seem to be higher levels. No man who has not had a long and arduous education can understand even the most elementary concepts of modern pathology. But even a hind at the plow can grasp the theory of chiropractic in two lessons. Hence the vast popularity of chiropractic among the submerged -- and of osteopathy, Christian Science and other such quackeries with it. They are idiotic, but they are simple -- and every man prefers what he can understand to what puzzles and dismays him.

The popularity of Fundamentalism among the inferior orders of men is explicable in exactly the same way. The cosmogonies that educated men toy with are all inordinately complex. To comprehend their veriest outlines requires an immense stock of knowledge, and a habit of thought. It would be as vain to try to teach to peasants or to the city proletariat as it would be to try to teach them to streptococci. But the cosmogony of Genesis is so simple that even a yokel can grasp it. It is set forth in a few phrases. It offers, to an ignorant man, the irresistible reasonableness of the nonsensical. So he accepts it with loud hosannas, and has one more excuse for hating his betters. Politics and the fine arts repeat the story. The issues that the former throw up are often so complex that, in the present state of human knowledge, they must remain impenetrable, even to the most enlightened men. How much easier to follow a mountebank with a shibboleth -- a Coolidge, a Wilson or a Roosevelt! The arts, like the sciences, demand special training, often very difficult. But in jazz there are simple rhythms, comprehensible even to savages. IV What all this amounts to is that the human race is divided into two sharply differentiated and mutually antagonistic classes, almost two genera -- a small minority that plays with ideas and is capable of taking them in, and a vast majority that finds them painful, and is thus arrayed against them, and against all who have traffic with them. The intellectual heritage of the race belongs to the minority, and to the minority only. The majority has no more to do with it than it has to do with ecclesiastic politics on Mars. In so far as that heritage is apprehended, it is viewed with enmity. But in the main it is not apprehended at all. That is why Beethoven survives. Of the ,, so-called human beings who now live in the United States, flogged and crazed by Coolidge, Rotary, the Ku Klux and the newspapers, it is probable that at least ,, have never heard of him at all. So far as they are concerned he might as well have died at birth. The gorgeous and incomparable beauties that he created are nothing to them. They get no value out of the fact that he existed. They are completely unaware of what he did in the world, and would not be interested if they were told. His music survives because it lies outside the plane of the popular apprehension, like the colors beyond violet or the concept of honor. If it could be brought within range, it would at once arouse hostility. Its complexity would challenge; its lace of moral purpose would affright. Soon there would be a movement to put it down, and Baptist clergymen would range the land denouncing it, and in the end some poor musician, taken in the un-American act of playing it, would be put on trial before a jury of Ku Kluxers, and railroaded to the calaboose. Five or six weeks ago, when the infidel Scopes was first laid by the heels, there was no uncertainty in all this smiling valley. The town boomers leaped to the assault as one man. Here was an unexampled, almost a miraculous chance to get Dayton upon the front pages, to make it talked about, to put it upon the map. Today, with the curtain barely rung up and the worst buffooneries to come, it is obvious to even town boomers that getting upon the map, like patriotism, is not enough. The getting there must be managed discreetly, adroitly, with careful regard to psychological niceties. The boomers of Dayton, alas, had no skill at such things, and the experts they called in were all quacks. The result now turns the communal liver to water. Two months ago the town was obscure and happy. Today it is a universal joke. All I can find is a sort of mystical confidence that God will somehow come to the rescue to reward His old and faithful partisans as they deserve -- that good will flow eventually out of what now seems to be heavily evil. More specifically, it is believed that settlers will be attracted to the town as to some refuge from the atheism of the great urban Sodoms and Gomorrahs. But will these refugees bring any money with them? Will they buy lots and build houses, Will they light the fires of the cold and silent blast furnace down the railroad tracks? On these points, I regret to report, optimism has to call in theology to aid it. Prayer can accomplish a lot. It can cure diabetes, find lost pocketbooks and restrain husbands from beating their wives. But is prayer made any more efficacious by giving a circus first? Coming to this thought, Dayton begins to sweat. The town, I confess, greatly surprised me. I expected to find a squalid Southern village, with darkies snoozing on the horse-blocks, pigs rooting under the houses and the inhabitants full of hookworm and malaria. What I found was a country town full of charm and even beauty -- a somewhat smallish but nevertheless very attractive Westminster or Balair. The houses are surrounded by pretty gardens, with cool green lawns and stately trees. The two chief streets are paved from curb to curb. The stores carry good stocks and have a metropolitan air, especially the drug, book, magazine, sporting goods and soda-water emporium of the estimable Robinson. A few of the town ancients still affect galluses and string ties, but the younger bucks are very nattily turned out. Scopes himself,

even in his shirt sleeves, would fit into any college campus in America save that of Harvard alone.

Chapter 3 : FACT CHECK: Scratched Nose with Power Drill

"Mr. Mencken, as we know, defends the American vernacular and at the same time is ever ready to laugh at the follies of its makers." To the nineteen-twenties H. L. Mencken was a dangerous.

A blog about anything that interests me in Maryland or the greater Mid-Atlantic area. Thursday, January 31, Graveside Service for H. Yet his memory is still kept alive by those who continue to value liberty in a world that increasingly does not. Do We Still Value Liberty? The men who fought for self-determination at Gettysburg were not the Federals but the Confederates. They also established a system with a built-in cognitive dissonance but elaboration of this idea is a topic for another day. In high-school civics class we were taught the childish fiction that The Constitution, and the Bill of Rights in particular, are there to limit the power of government and thus secure the liberty of the people. But if this is so, why would we want to limit ourselves? What of the prohibitions on what government may do? The actual history of the Constitution, as everyone knows, has been a history of the gradual abandonment of all such impediments to governmental tyranny. Bit by bit, Congress and the State Legislatures have invaded and nullified them. The Espionage Act cases, the labor injunction cases, the deportation cases, the Postal Act cases, the Mann Act cases, and the Prohibition cases [6]. Some of these are no longer good law. The names of most of these rubrics are sufficient to give one an idea of what they dealt with. Because of such writings, and many others, Mencken today is lauded as a defender of liberty. Mencken is certainly a rich source of well-turned phrases. But was he a defender of what no one wants any more, at least in the form understood by him and his contemporaries? But is even this notion of selective liberty still operative? That Americans complacently endure insults and indignities when they travel by air speaks louder than words. The newspaper reader had at least a sense of what was being considered and why it was important. There was Mencken, a man with a national audience, who could object to highly visible constrictions of liberty. I offer the following unextraordinary example. How many of you have heard of the country where people have been detained and strip searched for the following offenses: Surely such things could not happen here today! If they did happen here it would have been in a backwards time years ago and the laws permitting such things would have long ago been voided by our Supreme Court. The country is the United States of America, the land of the liberty-loving. The acts listed have occurred within, say, the last ten or so years. Over ninety years ago Mencken wrote: It is heartening that of the roughly two-thirds who disagreed there was no appreciable difference between Democrats and Republicans. The rest is only insult and oppression, and the citizen is under no more obligation to submit to it than he is to submit to any other insult or oppression. Minority Report , item The following suggestions for further reading are merely pointers to the huge body of writing about each set of cases. United States, U. Board of Chosen Freeholders of Burlington The case is Albert W. Board of Chosen Freeholders of County of Burlington, et al.

Chapter 4 : H. L. Mencken - Wikipedia

H.L. Mencken has a conservative problem. The Baltimore journalist became the poster boy for literary modernism thanks to his literary criticism and nationally syndicated op-ed columns, in addition.

New Urbanism will save some places. Most will fail; as well when majority of poor kids in school, they just will not be able to provide the tax income for maintaining infrastructure, let alone for new infrastructure! If you want to know what things will look like in thirty or forty years—look around. We can build more productive stuff on the existing infrastructure, or we can reduce the amount of infrastructure to come in to balance with the available productive capacity. And the results will be unevenly distributed. It is an article which should endear Mencken to the hearts of all Christians who contend for the authority of the Scriptures within the Church and routs from the field the practitioners of Moral Therapeutic Deism before that term was given birth. To newspaper reporters, as to other antinomians, a combat between Christians over a matter of dogma is essentially a comic affair, and in consequence Dr. The generality of readers, I suppose, gathered thereby the notion that he was simply another Fundamentalist on the order of William Jennings Bryan and the simian faithful of Appalachia. But he was actually a man of great learning, and, what is more, of sharp intelligence. He saw clearly that the only effects that could follow diluting and polluting Christianity in the Modernist manner would be its complete abandonment and ruin. Either it was true or it was not true. If, as he believed, it was true, then there could be no compromise with persons who sought to whittle away its essential postulates, however respectable their motives. Most of the other Protestant churches have gone the same way, but Dr. His one and only purpose was to hold it [the Church] resolutely to what he conceived to be the true faith. When that enterprise met with opposition he fought vigorously, and though he lost in the end and was forced out of Princeton it must be manifest that he marched off to Philadelphia with all the honors of war. Machen while he lived, though it was large, was not personal, for I never had the honor of meeting him. Moreover, the doctrine that he preached seemed to me, and still seems to me, to be excessively dubious. I stand much more chance of being converted to spiritualism, to Christian Science or even to the New Deal than to Calvinism, which occupies a place, in my cabinet of private horrors, but little removed from that of cannibalism. Machen had the same clear right to believe in it that I have to disbelieve in it, and though I could not yield to his reasoning I could at least admire, and did greatly admire, his remarkable clarity and cogency as an apologist, allowing him his primary assumptions. Claiming to be Christians as he was, and of the Calvinish persuasion, they endeavored fatuously to get rid of all the inescapable implications of their position. On the one hand they sought to retain membership in the fellowship of the faithful, but on the other hand they presumed to repeal and reenact with amendments the body of doctrine on which that fellowship rested. In particular, they essayed to overhaul the scriptural authority which lay at the bottom of the whole matter, retaining what coincided with their private notions and rejecting whatever upset them. Machen fell with loud shouts of alarm. He denied absolutely that anyone had a right to revise and sophisticate Holy Writ. Either it was the Word of God or it was not the Word of God, and if it was, then it was equally authoritative in all its details, and had to be accepted or rejected as a whole. Anyone was free to reject it, but no one was free to mutilate it or to read things into it that were not there. Thus the issue with the Modernists was clearly joined, and Dr. Machen argued them quite out of court, and sent them scurrying back to their literary and sociological Kaffeeklatsche. His operations, to be sure, did not prove that Holy Writ was infallible either as history or as theology, but they at least disposed of those who proposed to read it as they might read a newspaper, believing what they chose and rejecting what they chose. When the Prohibition imbecility fell upon the country, and a multitude of theological quacks, including not a few eminent Presbyterians, sought to read support for it into the New Testament, he attacked them with great vigor, and routed them easily. He not only proved that there was nothing in the teachings of Jesus to support so monstrous a folly; he proved abundantly that the known teachings of Jesus were unalterably against it. And having set forth that proof, he refused, as a convinced and honest Christian, to have anything to do with the dry jihad. The Presbyterian Church, like the other evangelical churches, was taken for a dizzy ride by Prohibition. Led into the heresy by fanatics of low mental

visibility, it presently found itself cheek by jowl with all sorts of criminals, and fast losing the respect of sensible people. Its bigwigs thus became extremely jumpy on the subject, and resented bitterly every exposure of their lamentable folly. Machen on the issue of Prohibition but with him on the issue of Modernism. Bryan was a Fundamentalist of the Tennessee or barnyard school. His theological ideas were those of a somewhat backward child of 8, and his defense of Holy Writ at Dayton during the Scopes trial was so ignorant and stupid that it must have given Dr. Machen a great deal of pain. Machen himself was to Bryan as the Matterhorn is to a wart. His Biblical studies had been wide and deep, and he was familiar with the almost interminable literature of the subject. Moreover, he was an adept theologian, and had a wealth of professional knowledge to support his ideas. Bryan could only bawl. Religion, if it is to retain any genuine significance, can never be reduced to a series of sweet attitudes, possible to anyone not actually in jail for felony. It is, on the contrary, a corpus of powerful and profound convictions, many of them not open to logical analysis. Its inherent improbabilities are not sources of weakness to it, but of strength. It is potent in a man in proportion as he is willing to reject all overt evidences, and accept its fundamental postulates, however unprovable they may be by secular means, as massive and incontrovertible facts. There was a time, two or three centuries ago, when the overwhelming majority of educated men were believers, but that is apparently true no longer. Indeed, it is my impression that at least two-thirds of them are now frank skeptics. They have tried to get rid of all the logical difficulties of religion, and yet preserve a generally pious cast of mind. It is a vain enterprise. What they have left, once they have achieved their imprudent scavenging, is hardly more than a row of hollow platitudes, as empty as [of] psychological force and effect as so many nursery rhymes. They may be good people and they may even be contented and happy, but they are no more religious than Dr. Machen tried to impress that obvious fact upon his fellow adherents of the Geneva Mohammed. He failedâ€”but he was undoubtedly right. Bush to those committed by Saddam. In short, conservatives many reasons besides religious ones to reject Mencken. Thrice A Viking March 11, at 3: A more profitable line of objection to his elitism might be how he expected to eat without relying on such folks? I know I did. Sydney Harrington March 11, at 6: Mencken as a political exemplar. This is a man who wrote an appreciative review of Mein Kampf â€” in ! A man who routinely described African Americans in simian terms. A man who remained virulently anti-Semitic until his death â€” in , when the facts of the Holocaust were well known. But that hardly seems sufficient justification for this cloying post, much less for a full rehabilitation. A mainline Protestant himself, his disdain for Fundamentalist excess was anything but radical. And he admired Catholicism for its sophisticated ability to condemn immorality, while at the same time realizing that practical governance required turning a blind eye to minor vices. This is the only country of Christendom in which there is no anti-clerical party, and hence no constant and effective criticism of clerical pretension and corruption. The result is that all of the churches reach out for tyranny among us, and that most of them that show any numerical strength already exercise it. In half a dozen of our largest cities the Catholic Church is actually a good deal more powerful than it is in Spain, or even in Austria. Its acts are wholly above public discussion; it makes and breaks public officials; it holds the newspapers in terror; it influences the police and the courts; it is strong enough to destroy and silence any man who objects to its polity. But this is not all. The Catholic Church, at worst, is an organization largely devoted to perfectly legitimate and even laudable purposes, and it is controlled by a class of men who are largely above popular passion, and intelligent enough to see beyond the immediate advantage. More important still, its international character gives it a detached and superior point of view, and so makes it stand aloof from some of the common weaknesses of the native mob. This is constantly revealed by its opposition to Prohibition, vice-crusading and other such crazes of the disinherited and unhappy. The rank and file of its members are ignorant and emotional and are thus almost ideal cannon-fodder for the bogus reformers who operate upon the proletariat, but they are held back by their clergy, to whose superior interest in genuine religion is added a centuries-old heritage of worldly wisdom. Thus the Church of Rome, in America at least, is a civilizing agency, and we may well overlook its cynical alliance with political corruption in view of its steady enmity to that greater corruption which destroys the very elements of liberty, peace and human dignity. It may be a bit too intelligently selfish and harshly realistic, but it is assuredly not swinish. It is out of this group that the dominating religious attitude of the American

people arises, and, in particular is from this group that we get our doctrine that religious activity is not to be challenged, however flagrantly it may stand in opposition to common honesty and common sense. Under cover of that artificial toleration "the product, not of a genuine liberalism, but simply of a mob distrust of dissent" there goes on a tyranny that it would be difficult to match in modern history. Save in a few large cities, every American community lies under a sacerdotal despotism whose devices are disingenuous and dishonourable, and whose power was magnificently displayed in the campaign for Prohibition "a despotism exercised by a body of ignorant, superstitious, self-seeking and thoroughly dishonest men. One may, without prejudice, reasonably defend the Catholic clergy. They are men who, at worst, pursue an intelligible ideal and dignify it with a real sacrifice. But in the presence of the Methodist clergy it is difficult to avoid giving way to the weakness of indignation. What one observes is a horde of uneducated and inflammatory dunderheads, eager for power, intolerant of opposition and full of a childish vanity "a mob of holy clerks but little raised, in intelligence and dignity, above the forlorn half-wits whose souls they chronically rack. In the whole United States there is scarcely one among them who stands forth as a man of sense and information. Illiterate in all save the elementals, untouched by the larger currents of thought, drunk with their power over dolts, crazed by their immunity to challenge by their betters, they carry over into the professional class of the country the spirit of the most stupid peasantry, and degrade religion to the estate of an idiotic phobia. There is not a village in America in which some such preposterous jackass is not in eruption. Worse, he is commonly the leader of its opinion "its pattern in reason, morals and good taste. Yet worse, he is ruler as well as pattern. Wrapped in his sacerdotal cloak, he stands above any effective criticism. To question his imbecile ideas is to stand in contumacy of the revelation of God. It was pretty depressing. One thing remains constant though: G Harvey March 12, at 3: And it was well worth the effort. He most certainly does not fit into any easily defined category. He was a curmudgeonly original writer.

Chapter 5 : H. L. Mencken " Page 3 " Old Life

Mencken began his national career as a literary critic, and his contributions to The Smart Set, of which he was co-editor with George Jean Nathan between and , fail to reveal more than the general drift of his political ideas.

In my estimation, this is hitting below the belt. Douthat has no professional qualifications for writing on the subject, the problem with his article and other recent statements is his view of Catholicism as unapologetically subject to a politically partisan narrative that has very little to do with what Catholicism really is. Moreover, accusing other members of the Catholic church of heresy, sometimes subtly, sometimes openly, is serious business that can have serious consequences for those so accused. This is not what we expect of the New York Times. Signatures followed by a number of historians whom I respect. They disappointed me because their scholarship had always suggested to me a breadth of outlook, not one that connoted the old days of parochial Roman Catholic history. Nor is it clear why Dr. Faggioli aside from being Italian has any more right to his views of the papacy than Ross Douthat. Thomas University on the list of gatekeepers in American society. Call me a Northeast corridor snob. When it wished to employ an editorialist about the economy, it selected a Nobel Prize winning professor. One wonders why the New York Times does not extend to the discipline of theology the same respect? These can be found outside of the theological academy, but they must be found somewhere. So perhaps rather than calling Mr. Douthat competent to act as an arbiter of theological truth? This is downright baffling. Do people who teach theology and church history have no clue about journalism? Lots of people have access to op-ed pages and have never had training in a discipline. Walter Lippmann was not an academic. Thomas Friedman apparently only has an M. So the New York Times is supposed to hire only Ph. If not, how parochial. The one element that stands out in this clash of professional authority " journalism vs. And yet, those who oppose Douthat make no reference to the authority of bishops, priests, and especially the pope. It is that the church is wide and tolerant and in need of a conversation just like the United States: Pope Francis represents the tiniest, most incremental steps toward shifts in doctrine that could have happened years ago, but he too is bombarded by vitriol from Catholics who see the church as a calcified, immobile monument. Douthat is likely one of those Catholics who would prefer the altar to be turned around, the pews shoved back into rigid rows, women kicked out of the sanctuary and Latin Mass brought back to a country where Latin is rarely taught in schools. And they can defend that choice to see the church as incapable of evolution with vitriol, anger and rage. And each of those people is qualified to talk about how they live that faith, whether they do so in the op-ed column of the Times, at a potluck, in the middle of the desert, on CNN, or here on RD. The Pope has asked us to try to listen to one another. Maybe we can start there.

Chapter 6 : The Irreverent Mr. Mencken - Taki's Magazine - Taki's Magazine

Had Mr. Hart done his homework, he would know a bit more about Chesterton than his detective novels (see the Cato interview for that little slip) and would have known that Chesterton was often on the same side as Mr. Mencken in their battle against progressive intolerance.

A Saturnalia of Bunk: Selections from the Free Lance, " , by H. Mencken, edited by S. Mencken were alive today! I should warn you that one cannot write about Mencken without aping him, however clumsily. The longtime Baltimore Evening Sun columnist, American Mercury editor, and rumbustiously splenetic critic, who graced this orb from to , would not be published in any major newspaper today. The reasons he foresaw over a century ago, when he decried the "cheap bullying and cheaper moralizing" whose purpose was the extirpation, the annihilation, of anything resembling a robust exchange of ideas. Two beliefs puffed up the righteous censor, according to Mencken: Down with free speech; up with the uplift! Joshi, who has chosen his primary scholarly interests"Mencken, H. Henry Louis Mencken churned out six of these 1,word meringues every week, a vertiginous pace that makes Joyce Carol Oates look like Harper Lee. Logorrheic bloggers aside, does anyone really have that much to say about the controversies of the day? Mencken once nicked Bierce for reprinting his early work, which was "filled with epigrams against frauds long dead and forgotten, and echoes of old and puerile newspaper controversies. Mencken, a dyed-in-the-wool third-generation Baltimorean, a sardonic citizen of his place, made his home in the house in which he grew up. Mencken is in these columns and was until his death a libertarian, with the usual idiosyncratic departures from dogma of any red-blooded man. He puts it plainly: Prohibitionists of all stripes"snouters" and "absurd fanatics" who would ban alcohol, tobacco, prostitution, vivisection, and Sunday baseball"are pilloried with an outrage that is always anchored in an amused appreciation of the human condition, and never in hatred. No one defends fallen women, the "ladies of vermilion," with quite as much verve as Henry Mencken. The common people, he says, "are always in favor of the man who promises to get something for them without cost to them"i. Yet in later years he covered political conventions with mischievous exuberance. He loved the spectacle, and conceded the American system "provides the only really amusing form of government ever endured by mankind. But no editor of the s was more encouraging to talented African-American writers than Mencken was; the last column he ever published, in November , was a rousing denunciation of segregated tennis courts in Baltimore. His columns as the Great War is breaking out in Europe are baldly pro-German, though he denies that this sympathy is an outgrowth of his own heritage. At least he refrains from calling for U. Like ice cream or penicillin, Mencken is best taken in dollops and doses. Two hundred"plus pages of verbal assaults on flapdoodle, balderdash, mountebanks, yeggmen, hokum, and anthropoid paralogists can be wearying. His blithe certitude that "the more fit shall conquer and obliterate the less fit" is less than endearing. He writes, tongue quite out of cheek, that "war is a good thing because it is honest" and that a vigorous engagement therewith is restorative, since "a nation too long at peace becomes a sort of gigantic old maid. His political judgments were sometimes unduly harsh, and he could be supremely unfair to those with whom he disagreed, valuing the bon mot over the deeper understanding" witness his sulfurous nastiness to William Jennings Bryan. Despite his superhuman output, Mencken was a man, not a god. The Life and Religious Times of H. His joie de vivre, his irrepressible good spirits, his lambent wit, his verbal winks while carving up some poor poltroon which convey a message of, "Hey, we gave them a show of it"how about we adjourn to the tavern for a seidel or five? Ohio University Press 1 Next Page.

Chapter 7 : Mencken for Conservatives | The American Conservative

Mencken also wrote about his own times with great detachment. In the s, he had Freud pegged for a quack and predicted that the Soviet Union would run out of gas and collapse. People also still read Mencken because he wrote " in the bluntest possible way" that men are not equal and that it was insane to pretend that they were.

December 02, H. Mencken Why do we still read Henry Louis Mencken? He was mostly a columnist, and columns are usually forgotten the day after they are published. One of the main reasons we still read Mencken is that he was enormously funny. The ability to write humorously about serious things is one of the rarest gifts an author can have. Mencken also wrote about his own times with great detachment. In the s, he had Freud pegged for a quack and predicted that the Soviet Union would run out of gas and collapse. He was a eugenicist and he ridiculed democracy. The mob is inert and moves ahead only when it is dragged or drivenâ€¦. Here the general average of intelligence, of knowledge, of competence, of integrity, of self-respect, of honor is so low that any man who knows his trade, does not fear ghosts, has read fifty good books, and practices the common decencies stands out as brilliantly as a wart on a bald head, and is thrown willy-nilly into a meager and exclusive aristocracy. If it were actually possible to give every citizen an equal voice in the management of the worldâ€¦the democratic ideal would reduce itself to an absurdity in six months. There would be an end to all progress. The truth, to the overwhelming majority of mankind, is indistinguishable from a headache. The candidates will all promise every man, woman and child in the country whatever he she or it wants. They will all know that votes are collared under democracy, not by talking sense but by talking nonsense, and they will apply themselves to the job with a hearty yo-heave-ho. Third Series Mencken was, however, a firm believer in law and order. As a reporter he attended no less than nine hangings, and he thought the rope was an effective and humane way to clear out the dross. The great problem ahead of the United States is that of reducing the high differential birthrate of the inferior orders, for example, the hillbillies of Appalachia, the gimme farmers of the Middle West, the lintheads of the South, and the Negroes. The prevailing political mountebanks have sought to put down a discussion of this as immoral: What the faithful Christian professes to believe, if put into the form of an affidavit, would be such shocking nonsense that even bishops and archbishops would laugh at it. In the preface to *A Treatise on the Gods* he wrote: There is no purpose here to shake the faithful, for I am completely free of the messianic itch, and do not like converts. Let those who believe, and enjoy it, heave this book into the dustbin, and go on reading the *War Cry* [the Salvation Army magazine]. When the AP asked him what he thought about that, he said: I felt a great uplift, shooting sensations in my nerves, and the sound of many things in my ears and I knew the house of representatives was praying for me again. Mencken opposed lynching and thought Southerners should take up bullfighting instead: Whatever the defects of the new commonwealth below the Potomac, it would have at least been a commonwealth founded upon a concept of human inequality, and with a superior minority at the helm. Let us not forget that it is poetry, not logic; beauty, not sense. Think of the argument in it. Put it into the cold words of everyday, the doctrine is simply this: It is difficult to imagine anything more untrue. The Union soldiers in that battle actually fought against self-determination; it was the Confederates who fought for the right of their people to govern themselves.

Chapter 8 : blog.quintoapp.com: Graveside Service for H.L. Mencken

Mr. Mencken's favorite method of showing people the truth is to attack falsehood with ridicule. He shatters the walls of foolish pride and prejudice and hypocrisy merely by laughing at them; and he is more effective against them than most writers who hurl heavily loaded shells of protest and imprecation.

I am, at times, an idealist; which I admit is just a hair shy of being a total nincompoop. But idealism being a favorite American pastime practiced by pastors, politicians, and social reformers alike, I find it safe to admit here and now that I often entertain my own ideals so as to discover just how deep down in the marrow my own nincompoopery goes. So, today, join me if you wish, as I open the door to my ideal stricken mind in order to engage in a little old-fashioned metaphysical speculation on how to reform our world for the better. Who should I call upon to guide us in our journey? Should it be my usual guide, Oscar Wilde? No, he is much too much in the heavens. His ideals lack practicality; he very rarely, if ever, comes down to earth. How about one of my other favorites, the natural egalitarian George Orwell? No, he is much too much in the other direction—too austere, too close to earth with his ideals. No, what we need is a guide who resides somewhere other than in heaven or on earth. Someone with moxie and a righteous mind. Someone unafraid to bushwhack the everyday buncombe accepted by most of society. Yet, someone unencumbered by any ivory tower penchant to systematically prove common sense truths which really only require a rhetorical spotlight to reveal their veracity. And finally, we mostly need a guide, if I may say so humbly, who shares some of my own ideals—in particular the ideal that government, or the State, is harmful to all people and should be whittled away as much as possible to the point of nada. I believe, ladies and gentlemen, I have found that someone: This ideal, I believe, will be realized in the world twenty or thirty centuries after I have passed from these scenes and taken up my public duties in Hell. Take leave from your public duties in the underworld. Give all those poor demons and guilty sinners a rest and grace us with your acerbic spirit. Even God Almighty rested on the seventh day. You have been toiling in the bureaucracies below for nearly sixty years now. It is high time you went on a holiday. Or, at least, kept the spirit of the Sabbath. Unfortunately, the idiot class is alive and well, but I am happy to inform you we have discovered new methods for smoking out imbeciles, mountebanks, and tee-totaling tyrants. In case your memory is rusty, you, H. Mencken, painted this portrait of an ideal world in , first appearing in the American Mercury: It raises the threshold of sensation and makes us less sensitive to external stimuli, and particularly to those that are unpleasant. Putting a brake upon all the qualities which enable us to get on in the world and shine before our fellows — for example, combativeness, shrewdness, diligence, ambition-, it releases the qualities which mellow us and make our fellows love us — for example, amiability, generosity, toleration, humor, sympathy. I have found the effects of liquid spirits and other fermentations—whether from the fruit of the vine, the juice of some other glorious fruit, or the grain of the ground—to be at times one of the closest things to orgasm other than, well, orgasm itself. The amiable effects of these elixirs have expectedly been dressed up in folklore: The scientists, of course, disagree with these folk tales. According to them, ethanol is ethanol is ethanol. But the superstitions persist, nonetheless, as superstitions are prone to do in the face of scientific facts. If I had to tell my own, home-brewed tall tales, I would say wine makes me want to sit in a low lit room and share a suggestive word or two with a romantic interest thus my bizarre confusion for many years seeing it featured as a prominent aspect of Roman Catholic mass. The fruit of the vine renders me switched on and adulterous rather than celibate or, even worse, monogamous. Whiskey, on the other hand, warms my belly and my face and beckons me to those barroom tables where whiskered men talk politics and tales of lost love peppered with pauses to puff tobacco smoke. Beer reminds me of my college days; it eventually gets the job done, just barely, and after many bouts with bitterness, graduates to a higher shelf with a dated, possibly unreliable seal of maturity. Vodka numbs my face and my mind as though I have been confined to a Siberian prison cell. Tequila strips me of all my clothes and provides me with the added assurance that I do, indeed, look as pristine as a Greek statue of old in my birthday suit—in spite of how much the morning mirror tells me I look akin to Mr. My, my you have grown forgetful in the execution of your under worldly duties. But I am happy to remind you as well as my fellow travelers

exact what your proposal is: I do not say drunk, remember; I say simply gently stewed and apologize, as in duty bound, for not knowing how to describe the state in a more seemly phrase. The man who is in it is a man who has put all of his best qualities into his showcase. He is not only immensely more amiable than the cold sober man; he is immeasurably more decent. He reacts to all situations in an expansive, generous and humane manner. He has become more liberal, more tolerant, more kind. He is a better citizen, husband, father, friend. Mencken, I must end my unchecked praise of your ideal portrait. I must quibble with you a bit though, no doubt, in a chummy way. As I said before, we have found new ways of smoking out the booboisie as well as all the tyrants, charlatans, and various other stripes of prude. I find this risk is much too high to be any sort of ideal. Americans today are particularly prone to binge on alcohol in many cruel and unusual ways to the point of oblivion. Let us not flirt with bringing more of them on the scene. But you are correct in your assessment that we cannot allow the teetotalers and drunks to run the place. Something, indeed, must be done. Mencken, your ideal portrait succeeds in almost every way but fails in one crucial way: There is, however, another intoxicant that could take humanity to much greater heights. This is the ideal. I must inform you, sir, that a robust culture has grown up around this plant. And the street names for all the different strains of indica and sativa are just as plentiful. You can smoke it, vape it, bake it, and grow it. Infuse it, wrap it, roll it, and toke it. You can rip a bong, smoke a j, pass a blunt, or even God forbid wake and bake on a Sunday. And as you must have seen during your time with alcohol prohibition, there is certainly a contemporary culture of prohibition surrounding cannabis. On the one hand, there is a beautifully defiant culture of admirable lawbreakers and lawmakers searching for liberty in the best way possible by acting as though they are already free because in fact they are free to do as they wish. And on the other hand, there is a brutish coalition of loathsome lawbreakers, lawmakers, and law enforcers not to mention the alcohol lobby in D. Many among us rightfully decry this regime of cannabis prohibition. But most prescriptions for ridding us of this awful state of affairs lack gusto and vision. Even those who wish to abolish the DEA altogether ending not only pot prohibition but the prohibition of all drugs in the process do not go far enough. This abolitionist position on drugs is perfectly respectable. It is a practical idea. The idea of ending evil systems is always worthy of practical consideration. But this is nowhere near close to the ideal. And if we do not strike at the root of what creates evil individuals in the first place, evil systems have a way of growing, well, like a weed. You have guided us well, Mr. Mencken, out of the woods and through the many levels of my utopian mind. You took us down so that we may climb up to heaven once again. And now, we have reached the summit. I propose that by any and all means possible, including by passage of an amendment to the Constitution of the United States of America, that once a week everybody must get stoned. Call it the Rainy Day Woman Amendment. This could be administered as you put it in terms of alcohol Mr. A whole variety of industries could arise, each seeking to help the citizenry carry out their weekly obligation to get baked in a subtle way. Mind you, I am not calling for an army of pot-heads. My goal is not to couch lock the nation, but simply and gently draw out the better parts of their human nature. Cannabis is much safer than alcohol. Less risk of maudlin displays. Less chance of fist fights breaking out. It may be said this proposal will lead some to go the way of the slacker. This is a true concern. But I would rather risk this possibility all day everyday than any alcoholic concern. We need less Churchillian drunkenness and more Cheechian humor, more Chongian mellow, and more Nelsonian sing songs. Furthermore, this proposal would succeed where the proponents of abolishing the drug war fall short. If we were to simply legalize pot, there would still be a collection of former DEA enforcers, fear-stricken parents, political drug warriors, and the like sowing discontent with their moralizing and tee-totaling. These people, above all, are the ones most in need of a bong rip, else they may find themselves unemployed and run for office only to discover new ways to meddle in the affairs of us amiable souls. If there is one thing the Puritan prohibitionists cannot stand, it is people engaged in beautiful merriment. But after a weekly dose of cannabis, I imagine their resentment of revelry would surely subside or, at least, be greatly reduced. War-making as such and on all levels would slowly come to a halt if my proposal were put into practice. This is a completely respectable position. I cannot argue with it. But when it comes to idealism, you cannot expect me to entertain the respectable and the sensible.

Chapter 9 : Mr. Soros Does His Bit - EURO-FOLK-RADIO

S.T. Joshi, who has chosen his primary scholarly interests "Mencken, H.P. Lovecraft, and Ambrose Bierce" with a fine eye for readability over reputation, has assembled a selection of Mencken's.

Mencken It is typical of American Kultur that it was incapable of understanding H. And it was typical of H. That a man of ebullient wit can be, in a sense, all the more devoted to positive ideas and principles is understood by very few; almost always, he is set down as a pure cynic and nihilist. This was and still is the common fate of H. Mencken; but it is no more than he would have cheerfully expected. Any man who is an individualist and a libertarian in this day and age has a difficult row to hoe. He finds himself in a world marked, if not dominated, by folly, fraud, and tyranny. He has, if he is a reflecting man, three possible courses of action open to him: To take this third route requires a special type of personality with a special type of judgment about the world. He must, on the one hand, be an individualist with a serene and unquenchable sense of self-confidence; he must be supremely "inner-directed" with no inner shame or quaking at going against the judgment of the herd. He must, secondly, have a supreme zest for enjoying life and the spectacle it affords; he must be an individualist who cares deeply about liberty and individual excellence, but who can "from that same dedication to truth and liberty" enjoy and lampoon a society that has turned its back on the best that it can achieve. And he must, thirdly, be deeply pessimistic about any possibility of changing and reforming the ideas and actions of the vast majority of his fellow-men. He must believe that boobus Americanus is doomed to be boobus Americanus forevermore. Put these qualities together, and we are a long way toward explaining the route taken by Henry Louis Mencken. Of course, Mencken had other qualities, too: Despite his omnivorous passion for intellectual fields and disciplines, he had no temperament for fashioning rigorous systems of thought "but then, how many people have? All these qualities reinforced his bent for what he became. A serene and confident individualist, dedicated to competence and excellence and deeply devoted to liberty, but convinced that the bulk of his fellows were beyond repair, Mencken carved out a role unique in American history: And in the course of this task, rarely undertaken in any age, a task performed purely for his own enjoyment, he exercised an enormous liberating force upon the best minds of a whole generation. It is characteristic of Mencken that one of the things he enjoyed the most was a Presidential convention, which he almost never failed to attend. Here he plunged into the midst of the teeming, raucous, and absurd throng: And then he would write up what he saw, slashing at the cant, hypocrisy, and concentrated nonsense of our governors in action. No one truly immersed in Mencken could emerge quite the same again; no one could retain the same faith in our "statesmen" or in the democratic political process itself, no one could ever be quite the same sucker for all manner of ideological, social, and political quackery, the same worshipper of solemn nonsense. A scholar in the English "or the American" language, Mencken had a love for the language, for precision and clarity of the word, a deep respect for his craft, that few writers have possessed. It was not hyperbole when the eminent critic and essayist Joseph Wood Krutch referred to Mencken as "the greatest prose stylist of the twentieth century"; this, too, has gone unrecognized because Americans are generally incapable of taking a witty writer seriously. If Mencken was not a nihilist, what positive values did he hold? His values included a devoted dedication to his craft "to his work as editor, journalist, linguist. This in turn reflected his thorough-going and pervasive individualism, with its corollary devotion to individual excellence and to individual liberty. They included a life-long passion for music. They included a perhaps excessive zeal for science, the scientific method, and medical orthodoxy; along with the zeal for science came a mechanistic type of determinism which undoubtedly helped to shape his pessimistic view of the possibility of changing the ideas and actions of men. It gave a system to his superficially piecemeal forays into innumerable fields. Let us take, for example, such a supposedly "non-political" field as folk-music. Mencken cut to the heart of the matter in his inimitable review of Dr. This is the theory that the ballads familiar to all of us It is difficult to imagine anything more idiotic, and yet this doctrine is cherished as something almost sacred by whole droves of professors and rammed annually into the skulls of innumerable candidates for the Ph. The notion that any respectable work of art can have a communal origin is wholly nonsensical. The plain people, taking them

together, are quite as incapable of a coherent esthetic impulse as they are of courage, honesty, or honor. The cathedrals of the Middle Ages were not planned and built by whole communities, but by individual men; and all the communities had to do with the business was to do the hard work, reluctantly and often badly. So with folk-song, folk-myth, folk-balladry The English ballads are to be accounted for in the same way. More, she shows the process of ballad making in our own time—how a song by a Paul Dresser or a Stephen Foster is borrowed by the folk, and then gradually debased. In a perceptive review, Putnam wrote that it was now evident that Mencken was a "Tory anarchist. To his good friend Hamilton Owens, he once solemnly declared: If ever a man is to achieve anything like dignity, it can happen only if superior men are given absolute freedom to think what they want to think and say what they want to say. I am against any man and any organization which seeks to limit or deny that freedom. I am against jailing men for their opinions, or, for that matter, for anything else. But I do not believe in even liberty enough to want to force it upon anyone. That is, I am nothing of the reformer, however much I may rant against this or that great curse or malaise. In that ranting there is usually far more delight than indignation. All government, in its essence, is a conspiracy against the superior man; its one permanent object is to oppress him and cripple him. If it be aristocratic in organization, then it seeks to protect the man who is superior only in law against the man who is superior in fact; if it be democratic, then it seeks to protect the man who is inferior in every way against both. One of its primary functions is to regiment men by force, to make them as much alike as possible and as dependent upon one another as possible, to search out and combat originality among them. All it can see in an original idea is potential change, and hence an invasion of its prerogatives. The most dangerous man, to any government, is the man who is able to think things out for himself, without regard to the prevailing superstitions and taboos. Almost inevitably he comes to the conclusion that the government he lives under is dishonest, insane and intolerable, and so, if he is romantic, he tries to change it. And even if he is not romantic personally he is very apt to spread discontent among those who are The average man, whatever his errors otherwise, at least sees clearly that government is something lying outside him and outside the generality of his fellow-men—that it is a separate, independent and often hostile power, only partly under his control, and capable of doing him great harm. In his romantic moments, he may think of it as a benevolent father or even as a sort of jinn or god, but he never thinks of it as part of himself. In time of trouble he looks to it to perform miracles for his benefit; at other times he sees it as an enemy with which he must do constant battle. Is it a fact of no little significance that robbing the government is everywhere regarded as a crime of less magnitude than robbing an individual? What lies behind all this, I believe, is a deep sense of the fundamental antagonism between the government and the people it governs. It is apprehended, not as a committee of citizens chosen to carry on the communal business of the whole population, but as a separate and autonomous corporation, mainly devoted to exploiting the population for the benefit of its own members. Robbing it is thus an act almost devoid of infamy When a private citizen is robbed a worthy man is deprived of the fruits of his industry and thrift; when the government is robbed the worst that happens is that certain rogues and loafers have less money to play with than they had before. The notion that they have earned that money is never entertained; to most sensible men it would seem ludicrous. They are simply rascals who, by accidents of law, have a somewhat dubious right to a share in the earnings of their fellow men. When that share is diminished by private enterprise the business is, on the whole, far more laudable than not. This gang is well-nigh immune to punishment. Its worst extortions, even when they are baldly for private profit, carry no certain penalties under our laws. Since the first days of the Republic, less than a dozen of its members have been impeached, and only a few obscure understrappers have ever been put into prison. The number of men sitting at Atlanta and Leavenworth for revolting against the extortions of government is always ten times as great as the number of government officials condemned for oppressing the taxpayers to their own gain There are no longer any citizens in the world; there are only subjects. They work day in and day out for their masters; they are bound to die for their masters at call On some bright tomorrow, a geological epoch or two hence, they will come to the end of their endurance After a revolution, of course, the successful revolutionists always try to convince doubters that they have achieved great things, and usually they hang any man who denies it. This ideal, I believe, will be realized in the world twenty or thirty centuries after I have passed from these scenes and taken up my public duties in Hell. These

men, in point of fact, are seldom if ever moved by anything rationally describable as public spirit; there is actually no more public spirit among them than among so many burglars or street-walkers. Their purpose, first, last and all the time, is to promote their private advantage, and to that end, and that end alone, they exercise all the vast powers that are in their hands. Whatever it is they seek, whether security, greater ease, more money or more power, it has to come out of the common stock, and so it diminishes the shares of all other men. Putting a new job-holder to work decreases the wages of every wage-earner in the land. Giving a job-holder more power takes something away from the liberty of all of us. Mencken goes on to add, on the nature of government and attempts to stem its incursions: It is, perhaps, a fact provocative of sour mirth that the Bill of Rights was designed trustfully to prohibit forever two of the favorite crimes of all known governments: It is a fact provocative of mirth yet more sour that the execution of these prohibitions was put into the hands of courts, which is to say, into the hands of lawyers, which is to say, into the hands of men specifically educated to discover legal excuses for dishonest, dishonorable and anti-social acts. It depends upon the credulity of man quite as much as upon his docility. Its aim is not merely to make him obey, but also to make him want to obey. So is a doctor. But suppose the dear fellow claimed the right, every time he was called in to prescribe for a bellyache or a ringing in the ears, to raid the family silver, use the family tooth-brushes, and execute the droit de seigneur upon the housemaid? The military caste did not originate as a party of patriots, but as a party of bandits. The primeval bandit chiefs eventually became kings. Something of the bandit character still attaches to the military professional. He may fight bravely and unselfishly, but so do gamecocks. He may seek no material rewards, but neither do hunting dogs. His general attitude of mind is stupid and anti-social. It was a sound instinct in the Founding Fathers that made them subordinate the military establishment to the civil power. To be sure, the civil power consists largely of political scoundrels, but they at least differ in outlook and purpose from the military. Thus, in a piece written in , before, as he put it, "the New Deal afflicted the country with a great mass of new administrative law and extra-tyrannical jobholders," Mencken proposed a searching reform in our system of administrative law. If a corrupt policeman got six months a corrupt chief of police got two years. More, these statutes were enforced with Prussian barbarity; and the jails were constantly full of errant officials.