


# Uncommon Sense

Providing Clarity, Promoting Intelligence

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**Issue: # 147**

**July 24, 2017**

**Dear David,**

 Ara Norwood

Greetings!

Just got back a week ago from my high school reunion. It was a 9-month commitment from me to organize and host it. Now that the weight of that event is off my shoulders, it's back to publishing *Uncommon Sense*.

You'll find some important insights on becoming a leader through reading; on why I believe Western Civilization itself is on a dangerous precipice; and some observations about the above-mentioned reunion.

OK, let's get started.


Ara Norwood

**Self-Development**

## Why Reading Matters

In the "From Ara's Journal" column below, you will read about my recent experience with my high school's 40 year reunion. One of the features of that reunion involved a survey sent to each class member asking a variety of questions, including who their all-time favorite teacher was. Claire Pelton came out on top. Mrs. Pelton, as we then called her, taught English. I was one of her students during my senior year. I recall that each week Mrs. Pelton had us learn 10 new vocabulary words. In fact, in some ways I think she may be the inspiration behind the "World of Words" column which closes out each issue of *Uncommon Sense*.

I interviewed Mrs. Pelton, now in her mid-80s, about a month ago and videotaped the conversation. I played that video at the reunion, and it really impacted some people. One of the things I asked her to address was why she was in the habit of having us learn new vocabulary words. She replied: "Words are strength. Words give you options that you otherwise would not have. I deliberately chose words that I thought my students would encounter in later life in order to expand the options that they'd have as adults."

I believe the same is true when it comes to reading books. The more books you read, the more options you  have because you have been exposed to a greater number of ideas, concepts, stories, quotes, lessons, models, and cases.

Once you complete a book, the content of that book is stored in your brain for later retrieval when needed. The more books you read, the larger the repository of knowledge you have to draw upon when needed.

Reading adds to your intellectual experience. The greater the number of books completed, the greater the body of knowledge you have exposed yourself to, which has molded and influenced you, and has made you a person of experience.

I recommend you get in the habit of regular reading. Choose your books wisely, and carve out regular time to read. Highlight portions that jump out at you, and write in the margin. And teach others what you learned, which will solidify your understanding.

Do this and you will almost certainly become a leader, and others will look to you for wisdom and guidance.


## **The Elephant in the Room**

### Western Civilization is in Peril

*"We urge Russia to cease its destabilizing activities in Ukraine and elsewhere, and its support for hostile regimes -- including Syria and Iran -- and to instead join the community of responsible nations in our fight against common enemies and in defense of civilization itself." -- Donald J. Trump*

Let's begin by defining our terms. What is *civilization*? This word refers to the society, culture, and way of life of a particular area. It refers to the process of civilizing, as in evolving a populace out of a savage, uneducated, or unrefined state into an advanced state of human society in which a high level of culture, science, industry, and government has been reached.

What is *Western Civilization*? The term refers to a broad heritage of social norms, ethical values, traditional customs, belief systems, political systems, and specific artifacts and technologies that have their origin in Europe, but applies today with greater force to countries such as the United States and, perhaps to a lesser degree, to Australia. Western Civilization is characterized by a host of artistic (think Michelangelo), philosophic (think Aristotle), literary (think Shakespeare), religious (think Jesus Christ), and legal themes (think Moses) and traditions, including such elements as Hellenistic philosophy, humanism, the Enlightenment, and, most especially, the Judean-Christian world-view. Add to that the distinctly American ideals of unity, entrepreneurship, free market capitalism, liberty, and the preservation of a God-based society presided over by a secular government that not only is not hostile towards religion, but supportive of religion.

Western civilization is in danger of ruination. While there are outside forces that seek to destroy Western  Decline civilization (Islamic terrorism, for example), there are many forces within the tradition itself that seek to bring about a death by suicide.

Earlier this month, on July 6th, President Trump spoke in Poland on this very theme. The transcript can be [read here](#).

Three excerpts from his speech touched on the fragile nature of Western Civilization:

*"Americans, Poles, and the nations of Europe value individual freedom and sovereignty. We must work together to confront forces, whether they come from inside or out, from the South or the East, that threaten over time to undermine these values and to erase the bonds of culture, faith and tradition that make us who we are. If left unchecked, these forces will undermine our courage, sap our spirit, and weaken our will to defend ourselves and our societies."*

*"The fundamental question of our time is whether the West has the will to survive. Do we have the confidence in our values to defend them at any cost? Do we have enough respect for our citizens to protect our borders? Do we have the desire and the courage to preserve our civilization in the face of those who would subvert and destroy it?"*

*"Our own fight for the West does not begin on the battlefield -- it begins with our minds, our wills, and our souls. Today, the ties that unite our civilization are no less vital, and demand no less defense, than that bare shred of land on which the hope of Poland once totally rested. Our freedom, our civilization, and our survival depend on these bonds of history, culture, and memory."*

And how did the Leftists among us react to such a speech? With predictability. They labeled such language as I have quoted above racist -- their favorite bait-

card. The Left hates America and the Left hates Western civilization, and will aid and abet any force that seeks to destroy it ([including](#) Islamic terrorists.) Thus, Peter Beinart, [writing in the Atlantic](#), opens with this drivel: "In his speech in Poland on Thursday, Donald Trump referred 10 times to 'the West' and five times to 'our civilization.' His white nationalist supporters will understand exactly what he means." Beinart sees such wording as a sort of "dog whistle" -- code language that is meant to prop up white supremacist notions and stir up skin-heads, as if skin-heads preoccupy the mind of our current President.

Beinart goes on to opine, "*The West* is a racial and religious term. To be considered Western, a country must be largely Christian (preferably Protestant or Catholic) and largely white." Such is the jaundiced paradigm of today's Leftists. But in this they stand alone; normal human beings do not associate Western Civilization with skin color -- only Leftists do. Thus, in my view, Clarence Thomas of the U.S. Supreme Court, who is black, embodies the values of Western Civilization, while Mohammed VI, King of Morocco, who is white, does not.

Here are some of the forces that are busy trying to unravel Western Civilization:

**The mainstream news media.** President Donald Trump is not crying wolf when he decries the fake news that is fed to us from the mainstream media. The *New York Times*, [CNN](#), the *Washington Post*, the *Los Angeles Times*, and other major and cable news outlets deliberately distort the news and often put out stories that are [out-and-out fiction](#). (And many of them are just [downright cruel](#).) Almost all of the major news media are simply arms for the [Democratic Party](#) and slant their news stories with the express intent of making Republicans look bad and especially making Donald Trump look as bad as possible (which, unfortunately, he often does a fine job of that himself.) Further, the mainstream media simply [won't report](#) news that doesn't fit their Leftist narrative. Thus, for those among us who form their worldview from the mainstream media, and who uncritically accept the narrative put forth by such outlets, a dark fiction blankets the minds of such persons. To put it bluntly, they believe utter nonsense and live in a fantasy world.

**Colleges and Universities.** At many American universities today, the American flag is seen as a threat that must be removed. College students have been reduced to dainty little glass figurines who [learn nothing](#), as they flock to safe spaces where they can be supplied with coloring books, or kittens to calm their frayed nerves. Some students [demand they be given no homework](#), and their spineless college president accommodates such nuttiness. Harvard students have been further coddled with new policies no longer penalizing them for overdue library books since their fragile sensibilities are under such immense pressure merely by being at Harvard. Trigger Warnings, Cultural Appropriation, Inclusiveness for everything but religious conservatives, and being generally offended clouds the minds of most college students at most universities today. We are raising a gang of wimps with no backbone, and these spoiled brats are soon going to enter the job market. God help us.

**The LGBTQ Movement.** This movement is not, as it claims, bent on attaining equality. They wish to destroy normalcy and replace it with something that is far removed from traditional standards of morality. Thus, some LGBTQ activists are

one shade [less cruel](#) than the typical ISIS fighter, held back only by the remnants of law and order that make such mayhem illegal. The LGBTQ alliance wishes to make same-sex relations the norm, heterosexual relations the aberration, and their war on gender is ugly and relentless. If they had their way, there would be no such thing as gender distinctions -- something they innately abhor. They will continue to push for legislation that harms religious believers and that makes being "Queer" something to admire and strive for.

**The Drug Culture.** There is a drug epidemic sweeping the nation. The so-called "War on Drugs" is being lost like never before. People I would never have imagined getting involved in illegal drugs are being swept away by its swift current in numbers that are shocking, as the 12 mugshots below demonstrate, as they are all of the same young lady who could not shake her addiction. Leftist lawmakers,



lawless in their own hearts, are making illegal drug use a minor offense, worthy of a mild slap on the wrist, while the families of drug addicts are left defenseless in their efforts to get control of a horrific situation, while the addict assaults the members of his/her own family, brings shame to the family name, steals from the very family that feeds them, vandalizes their own home, and loses their ability to earn a living. Such addicts often end up on our streets, panhandle and harass passerby's, urinate and defecate on public sidewalks, and often resort to burglary and robbery to acquire money for their next fix.

**The failure to secure our borders.** People cross our borders illegally with regularity, many of whom are drug dealers, many of whom have no skills, many of whom are dangerous criminals who have no compunction about murdering our citizens. And if the people crossing our borders are from Muslim countries, they rarely assimilate and adopt American values. Thus, our healthcare system is depleted, our education system is taxed beyond its ability to function effectively, and enclaves of foreigners who despise our values grow in strength, defying law enforcement, eventually morphing into a safe haven to spew out terrorists who will commit murder without compunction, something only possible due to the naïve notions of compassion and inclusion by Leftists.

**The Abortion Rights activists.** Abortion is the destruction of an unborn baby. Rarely is it ever a moral option. Most of the time it is done out of selfish convenience. And organizations such as Planned Parenthood have been shown to be in the business of pushing for abortion over every other option available, so that they can sell the harvested body parts of the now destroyed fetus and reap a profit. Women who turn to such methodic death camps are complicit in such barbarity and will one day have to account for such wickedness before the throne of the Almighty. And as the abortion culture permeates the larger American culture, we will see a new worldview take hold of the average citizen, one where death is seen as normal and acceptable, and where life loses much of its value.

**Radicals who seek to undermine free speech.** College campuses today have become hotbeds of violence (i.e., UC Berkeley) whenever a conservative speaker attempts to deliver a speech they were invited to give. They are [shouted down](#), they are threatened with violence, they are blocked from entering the building

where they are to speak, other students are blocked from access, and in some cases, they or their handlers are actually [physically assaulted](#).

**A direct assault on our Founding Fathers.** Founders such as [Thomas Jefferson](#), George Washington, and others are constantly under assault. These titans who launched the greatest experiment in human history in self-governance are seen as nothing more than dead white men who were slave holders. Leftists are actively trying to banish them from memory. The idea is to forget who we are, to forget our origins, to forget our past, to rewrite history.

All of the above items, plus several others (the religion known as Global Warming comes to mind) are all tools used by Leftists to attempt to undermine, weaken, and ultimately destroy Western Civilization as we know it. And they are succeeding. Unless a large crop of new leaders who understand history, and who understand what is at stake, rise up and confront decisively the eroding acids of Leftist dogma, the day will come where Western Civilization will be a thing of the past. Such is the lethality of the Progressive Left.

And that, my friends, is the latest elephant in the room.

## **From Ara's Journal**

### Lessons Learned

I recently attended my high school's 40-year reunion. As it turns out, I was the host of that great event. Serving as host put me in a position of leadership, and I had to make a lot of decisions, particularly on many logistical matters (i.e., Where would he hold the event? When would we hold it? How formal or informal should it be? What would we serve for food? How much would we charge? How would we promote it? Would there be a theme?)



Journal  
Writing

We ended up going with a semi-formal affair with a buffet dinner, and a formal program for a portion of the event. The sheer number of details to manage was vast, and fortunately, I had various people step up and agree to take on certain assignments. Still, the lion's share of the tasks to be managed fell to me, and I spent the better part of nine months and hundreds of hours planning and organizing.

It turned out to be a first-rate affair, and the attendees, over 240 of them, seemed to have a fantastic time. I am pleased they were pleased, and they demonstrated their gratitude towards me by rewarding me and my wife with an all-expense paid mini-vacation at a beach resort, presenting my wife with a large arrangement of flowers, and presenting to me a beautifully framed painting of George Washington kneeling in prayer at Valley Forge. I was moved to the point of tears. That painting now hangs in my home office directly above my desk.

Hosting this reunion taught me a number of lessons, among them the following:

- Forty years of life experience, especially from the starting point of age 18, tends to have a profound effect on a person, and take them down a path that is life-changing.
- Every person goes down a particular path, and the outcomes can be uber-unique. There are people in my graduating class who flew below the radar, yet really made something of their lives, becoming multi-millionaires in the process. And there are individuals in my graduating class who were very visible, leaders of the first-order in high school, whom I imagined would become U.S. Senators or CEOs of major organizations, but who ended up in and out of jail, wrestling with drug addiction (something they never got near while in high school), and basically leading lives fraught with hardship.
- The various cliques that dominated high school life seemed to have lost their ardor, and people seemed genuinely open and accepting of everyone else.
- Quite a few people from my class are divorced, and of those who are married, most have two children.
- In terms of how we looked, some people had clearly let themselves go, and had gained quite a bit of weight. Others, had really taken care of themselves and looked fantastic. Two women come to mind here. SW was never what I would call attractive in high school, yet she was quite glamorous at the reunion, and had clearly transformed herself. KT was always on the attractive side in high school, but was now so striking, she could have appeared on the cover of a magazine! And TJ, who was relatively well-built in high school, had clearly taken care of himself in the intervening years, and was extremely strong and sculpted.
- All seemed to understand the uniqueness of the high school experience. It is very different from the college experience. Most of us grew up together, from elementary school, through junior high school, and through four years of high school, playing on the same sports teams, attending the same school dances, performing in the same musical groups, acting in the same drama productions, joining the same clubs, learning in the same classrooms, and graduating together. The high school experience bonded us together, taught us about school spirit and camaraderie, and made us players in the same formative adventure.
- Chairing this event did not enable me to enjoy it as a regular participant. I barely touched my dinner, and I hardly spoke to anyone for any length, for I was too busy managing the myriad details that had to be executed, including running the slide show and the music for the In Memoriam segment where we honored the 30 classmates who were deceased, activating the video greetings sent in by two of the most popular teachers, running the dance music, and even performing on the guitar with other musicians for some live entertainment. I missed the conversations I might have had. But I was happy to see everyone else engaged in meaningful conversation.

Not everything went as planned. The sound system, to name one example, powerful as it was, was inadequate in extending to the far reaches of the 3-room facility we were in. People at the perimeter simply could not hear what was being said from the microphone, and the din from the many conversations taking place throughout all three halls didn't help. But the overall outcome, including the gift bags, the Memory Book that I wrote and distributed, the buffet dinner, the door prizes, the memorabilia table, the music, the name tags complete with senior

portraits scanned in, and the renewing of friendships was both pleasant and satisfying. It was nice to be part of a successful event.

And yes, I'm both glad and sad it's over.

## The World of Words

### Brinksmanship

#### Building Your Power of Expression



Dictionary

Brinksmanship, n.

Pronunciation: brɪŋkmənʃɪp

Meaning: The art or practice of pursuing a dangerous policy to the limits of safety before stopping, typically in international affairs or foreign policy. It is the technique of maneuvering a dangerous situation to the limits of tolerance in order to secure the greatest advantage, especially by creating diplomatic crises.

Usage:

- *When Amber threatened to quit her job, she hoped her brinksmanship would force her employer to give her a pay raise.*
- *The North Korean dictator is caught up in his brinksmanship and insists on making nuclear threats.*
- *This has led to periodic brinksmanship over whether Congress would act in time to avoid disruption.*

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New subscribers, the Special Report "11 Ways to Beat the Odds" should have been sent out to you already. If you have not received it, please communicate that to me via email ([ara@aranorwood.com](mailto:ara@aranorwood.com)).

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