Historical Reality:
The Bottle of ink?
The one we share?
The one that chronicles
All time?
It was never full
Nor was it ever empty.
Freud filled his pen from it.
So do we.

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Our Anxieties

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Abstract: This essay assumes that we cannot do much to alleviate anxiety in U.S. society unless we shine a light on the many sources of it. Its purpose is to begin a conversation about these sources of anxiety. These sources are in part of our own making and in part brought here. Poor childrearing and health care, hunger, overuse of weapons to defend against others, political uncertainty, and technology can all be blamed. Anti-Semitism is also a source of intense anxiety, which is generally higher in eastern rather than Western Europe.

Keywords: anxietatem, child-abuse, hunger, Jews, medical-care, Poland, political-uncertainty, technology, weaponry

The English word for anxiety originated with the Greek *anisychía*, but it came to us more directly through the Latin *anxietatem*. Anxiety is an ancient phenomenon, and before one can do anything significant about it, one has to understand its origins. Different populations seem to suffer greater or lesser levels of anxiety. Longin Pastushek, the Polish historian and politician, said that in Europe, the most anxious people live(d) east of the Elbe River. His definition includes Jews that used to live in this area and who have been targets of hatred.

Pastushek's point is well taken and supported by Timothy Snyder ("Hitler vs. Stalin: Who Killed More," *New York Review of Books*, March 10, 2011, 1-4). Jews, like others living in Poland,

Ukraine, and Moldova, had every reason to be anxious. As a group, these nations or ethnic groups most recently were the people living in the middle, that is, between German speakers and states on the west and Russian speakers and states on the east. But this is not a new situation. Since time immemorial, this area was overrun by military forces, starting as far back as the Scythians and suffering through Huns, Byzantines, Mongols, Tatars, Turks, Swedes, and Russians through to the Nazi and Soviet armies and occupiers. Also, many farmworkers remained unfree peasants even into the 19th century.

For Jews, one must add another layer of individual and group anxiety: according to eastern and western Christian teaching, they were responsible for the killing of Christ, thus justifying individual, church, and state persecutions. Being forced to live in ghettos was part of the odd solution, long before the Nazis designed their "final solution." Living in ghettos induced anxiety for being identified as different, thereby excludable, and thus the constant fear of not being able to find a decent livelihood and lacking general well-being. The ghetto concentrations in Poland and Ukraine also made it easier for mobs and Russian Imperial troops to attack Jews at the outset of the 20th century. Further, the middle-high German dialect of Yiddish and their frequent Germanic last names identified them as Jewish. To add insult to injury, when some left their ghettos for Western Europe, they were shunned by the "established" Jews for looking different and speaking street German. The concentration camps, mostly located in Poland, were the ultimate outcome of this isolation and mistreatment. It is with good reason that a Jew, Sigmund Freud, had already discovered psychoanalysis to cope with anxieties in his Austro-Hungarian world of Vienna. Jews and other survivors of traumatic treatment brought their anxiety to the U.S. The shadow of the past hangs over them as individuals and as a group. For years, exclusionary behavior by the main ethnic groups only added to this anxiety.

This country has created its own amazing individual and group anxieties, for greater or lesser reasons. The greatest reason for anxiety, fear or *angst*, originates in part with children who are brought up to fear and be anxious. All too many parents abuse them, having been abused themselves (Christian Pfeiffer, "The Abolition of the Parental Right to Corporal Punishment in Sweden, Germany and other European Countries: A Model for the United States and other Democracies?", *Kriminologisches Forschungsin-*

stitut Niedersachsen e.V., No. 128, 2015). Many others experience extreme trauma in their neighborhoods, living in dangerous areas in which they must fear strangers. Others grow up in single-parent households in which they experience extreme poverty. Millions sink into bed hungry every night in a society in which very few of the 657 billionaires care about their plight, spending instead millions to protect their wealth from the IRS. What do we do as a society to alleviate these fear-inducing travesties? Prohibiting the beating of children in schools and at home in all states should help to lessen childhood anxiety. As the English poet William Wordsworth and Freud wrote, "the child is father of the man."

Then there is our flawed health care system, which is highly decentralized and seeks profit more than the wellness of human beings. The botched-up response to COVID-19 in the U.S. stands in vivid contrast to the heroic individual care in hospitals and other settings, and our failure to tackle the pandemic as a society. Here and abroad most people are scared "to death" of this plague; here because too little has so far been done to alleviate it or foster awareness of the sordid corruption of the system. Again, what can we do as a society to bring better health care to all Americans?

Another fear also thrives in the United States: fear of the other. We arm ourselves to the teeth out of fear that someone will attack, rob, or kill us. As far as anyone can tell, to ward off this fear, we own nearly half of the civilian-owned guns on the planet (Kara Fox, "How U.S. gun culture compares with the world," CNN, August 6, 2019) and have about 4% of the world's population. The more guns we buy, the less safe we seem to feel.

The reality is that most of our neighborhoods and cities are safe; it is, for example, just a few blocks in most cities that have high crime rates. But certain organizations, politicians, and media have succeeded in telling us that we are not safe anywhere in the U.S. All data indicate the opposite: The crime rate has declined significantly over the past few decades (John Gramlich, "What the data says (and doesn't say) about crime in the United States," *Pew Research Center*, November 20, 2020). All the same, and this is frightening to many, about 40,000 Americans die every year of gun violence (John Gramlich, "What the data says about gun deaths in the U.S.," *Pew Research Center*, August 16, 2019). How can we persuade those who own guns that their ownership of them is the issue?

Another fear is that of outsiders. On January 1, 2021, the U.S. Capitol passed another massive budget in support of the U.S. military. Not only does the country make and sell more weapons than any other, but we also have the most powerful military (Martin Armstrong, "The World's Most Powerful Militaries," *Statista*, January 15, 2021). The hyped wall toward Mexico is an expression of the same fear of outsiders, but our support and massive military show the full extent of our eagerness to arm ourselves to alleviate this set of anxieties. Indeed, the outside world must be held at bay and warded off. Can we persuade ourselves that more weapons and troops may not be the solution to our fears?

Two more fears traverse our society. The first is that one might fall behind or off the grid altogether. It stems from a widespread and extreme competitive drive that does not allow or readily permit failure. It thrives especially because of failure connected to an arbitrary employment decision made thousands of miles away or competition between people in one's own offices (Howard Stein, *Nothing Personal, Just Business: A Guided Journey into Organizational Darkness*, 2001). This fear is now driven further by job insecurity that many Americans experience as a consequence of COVID-19. The service sector is in shambles with restaurants and neighborhood stores closing while people working in other sectors are thriving. How can one create a society that alleviates fears resulting from a pandemic and an imbalanced economy? This fear seems to be related to political infighting; we have near-civil war conditions that resulted in part in the recent violent attack on the Capitol. What can we undertake as a society to lessen the internal tension?

The second fear is related to technology. We are asked to keep up with this or that new device or program practically daily. All the passwords we need to create and somehow recall or let another program remember are another source of anxiety. All the while we read about a Russian security breach that may undo all of these efforts; some tech-savvy person somewhere may harvest our bank accounts. Is it possible to reduce this fear by creating less anxiety-inducing programs and networks?

Recent U.S. policymakers have done nothing to mitigate individual and group fears originating from abusive childrearing, hunger, poor health care, over-arming, falling behind, job losses, political infighting, and technology. If anything, some encouraged fear and unease to consolidate and hold power. What can and

should be done on this level to reduce anxieties?

Peter W. Petschauer's *biography is on page 16.* ❑

Our Anxiety Can be Reduced by Addressing the World's Problems

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Keywords: Armenians, Azerbaijan, climate-change, election, politics, Trump, Turkey

Anxiety, aside from its intrapsychic causes, should be examined in terms of major societal issues such as the threats of climate change, nuclear mistakes, and deliberate nuclear war. When my brothers and I were in grade school, we had to hide under our desks during a drill in case of an air attack; as a result of her horror at our being subjected to this, my mother became an anti-nuclear activist and spent decades working for an anti-nuclear proliferation treaty. Until the threat to U.S. democracy from Trump and the issues about racism created our current consequential historical moment, my own primary concern, overarching all others, was environmental destruction (climate change). My concern began in the 1950s when construction started on the Interstate Highway System and was heightened in 1962 by Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*. Since then, I have spoken out about environmental deterioration with almost everyone I meet, starting with taxi drivers. Almost universally I hear anxiety and helplessness.

However, today I am also anxious about ethnic and race relations in the U.S., although my primary work has been on ethnic relations in the Armenian-Turkish-Azerbaijani set of relationships. Currently, the relationships are hotly simmering after a very unsettled 44-day war at the end of 2020: Azerbaijan backed by Turkey invaded Armenian-held lands and Armenia lost badly. The situation is complicated, but there is no dispute that an immense power imbalance exists between Armenia and Turkish-backed Azerbaijan. The resulting political turmoil in Armenia is leading to an election at the end of June. Armenians are scared, sad, and angry.

Turkey, the successor state to the Ottoman Empire, has not disavowed the Empire's genocidal policy against the Armenian people. The history of Russian protection of Armenia persists, but