

The Children

by Bill Herbst

*Version 1.5 (posted on 9 February 2021)
© 2021 by the author, all rights reserved*

First, some statistics about the current American population:

- **26%** of the people in America are 20 years old or younger, meaning that they were born in the 21st century.
- **12%** of Americans are age ten or younger.
- **6%** are age five or younger.

This means, of course, that many millions of Americans are literally children. To my way of thinking, however, we have much higher percentages within the American population of people who are not *literally* children but are *effectively* children. These Americans are technically adults in their chronological age and body size, as well as usually in social standing, but in their behavioral, psychological, and spiritual maturity, they remain children. Perhaps I should use the word childish to describe them, since I'm not including people who are simply naïve or child-like.

I'm not talking about any lack of intellect or I.Q. here. Intellect has precious little to do with maturity. Many of the people I regard as childish are wicked smart and very accomplished intellectually, with educational credentials that are quite impressive. Nor am I including social sophistication in my judgments.

Consider for instance U.S. Senator Josh Hawley from Missouri. Hawley went to a posh private prep school and holds university degrees from Stanford and Yale Law School. From the crude and superficial standpoint of cultural prestige, this is an impressive educational resumé. Among the Ah-Ha's I've gleaned over my 71 years, however, is the realization that doing well in school is neither a valid nor reliable measure of how truly smart one is, and Josh Hawley is a great example of that disconnect.

Hawley is also socially sophisticated. I'd qualify that somewhat, though, and define him more precisely as a slick operator, which is true of so many politicians (think Bill Clinton...).

At age 41, Hawley has become a rising star in the Republican Party. And yet, I don't regard him as anything close to an adult. No, Josh Hawley is a child, and a spoiled one at that. He's a privileged, arrogant careerist whose focus on self-

aggrandizement and personal advancement are both compulsive and total. He clearly wants to be President, which as a driving desire in itself indicates a certain immaturity. *[Note: I consider wanting to be President as a disqualifying feature for the job. Anyone who wants to be President probably shouldn't be. That applies to Democrats, Republicans, Libertarians, Socialists, and slimy real estate developers who managed to become TV stars.]* Politics aside, I wouldn't trust this asshole Hawley as far as I could throw him. The fact that he is *my* Senator — I was born in Missouri and currently reside there after long stints in Minnesota and Oregon — is an extreme embarrassment for me, but that's the reality of living in one of the reddist of red states.

Now, Josh Hawley is a particularly egregious and infantile example of a child inhabiting an adult's body, but this country is chock full of childish adults. How many? I won't hazard a guess because the shades of gray are nearly infinite — most of us embody a certain permanent childishness that arises for different reasons and expresses itself at different occasions in a myriad of forms — but I fear that the numbers of people for whom childishness is central (a feature rather than a bug, and the overriding core of the personality) are significant.

I'm posting this commentary on the very same day that the second impeachment trial of now former-President Donald J. Trump begins in the U.S. Senate. We all know that there's not a snowball's chance in hell of Trump being convicted. Why? Because Republicans in the Senate are overwhelmingly children — *de facto* followers of that reprehensible Pied Piper, who himself is not merely childish but downright infantile. Even Republicans in Congress who loathe Trump are scared to death of the 70-million-strong Trump Cult of American voters. And lest you, dear reader, presume that I buy the ludicrous MSNBC narrative that Democrats are wonderful, let me assure you that I don't. The percentage of children among Democrats is perhaps not as high as with Republicans, but both poles of the Uniparty are stuffed to the gills with them. My point here, however, is that the impeachment trial is a farce, an absurd burlesque as ludicrous as any "show trial" from the Stalinist Soviet Union during the mid-20th century.

As a country, America seems to be stuck in the Terrible Twos. That's the stage in human development around the age of two years old when babies discover that their identity as an ego can be bolstered by claiming exclusive ownership of possessions and property. During the Terrible Twos, everything is "*I, Me, Mine*" (which is the sardonic title of a song penned by Beatle George Harrison, and of his autobiographical memoir as well.)

Traits such as empathy, compassion, cooperation, and sharing are barely if at all present during the Terrible Twos. While it's natural for human beings to go through this brief period of selfishness as part of building a healthy ego, it's expected that we will pass through that stage fairly quickly and move into the realm of moral-ethical socialization within a couple of years. Too often, though, we don't.

Essentially, this is about the tyranny of our precious, ego-based selves. If we come to believe that we ARE our egos and let them drive the car and call the shots, then we risk remaining locked into that early phase of avarice. If that occurs, the arrested development can shape and influence our later years as toxic underpinnings of adulthood. Exaltation of the self becomes a permanent *raison d'être*. We may try to hide our narcissism, but it tends to bleed through.

Many of the world's most profound spiritual traditions focus at least in part on the long and arduous process of undoing habitual attachment to our egos through transcendence into a larger dimension of selfhood — moving past I-Me-Mine into We-Us-Ours. The many disciplines to achieve such transcendence call on our basic inner wish to belong to something greater than ourselves.

Unfortunately, this path is fraught with seductions from all sides. For instance, some people's life-journeys are naturally and correctly focused on Warrior Consciousness. For these individuals, a career in the military would be entirely appropriate, for life as a soldier is exactly what they're here to experience. The same applies to many people for whom pursuit of personal wealth is natural in learning the value of well-padded selfhood. But too many of those who enlist and serve in the military do so for questionable reasons — economic limitations or wide-eyed patriotism — and their time as soldiers not only doesn't serve them, but may seriously damage them for the rest of their lives. And way too many people are obsessed with the acquisition of material wealth, especially here in America, where that orientation is considered normal and positive. Those people remain stuck in the Terrible Twos.

And yes, I realize that I'm the pot calling the kettle black. I have more than enough childishness inside me. What I'm getting at, though, is that immaturity is not rare among human beings. In fact, arrested development of full humanity is the standard condition for many of us. That's not to suggest that mature humans don't exist. They do, probably in the billions. Too often, however, modern culture highlights the most childish among us as inadvertent role models.

I'm not saying that adults shouldn't have fun. Everyone gets to be over the top at times, and some people rely on outrageousness as career performance art. OK. I'm not for that, but I'm not against it, either. My concern here is with people, especially those in positions of power or authority, whose apparent maturity or gravitas is a pose, but who remain children underneath that facade. Seems to me that there's an awful lot of that going on.

What I'd like to see is a more social acknowledgment of true maturity as special and worthy of recognition, as well as more acknowledgment that we're all struggling to grow up. I consider those necessary prerequisites for saving civilization.

Fat chance, eh? After all, this is America, where immaturity is the golden ticket to a child's dream of fame and fortune. And if you can pretend to be an adult and still get the goodies, so much the better.