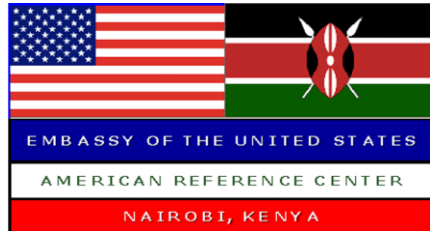




Public Affairs Section
United States Embassy Nairobi



INFOALERT JUNE 2009

DEMOCRACY AND GLOBAL ISSUES

IA48 Wolfshenk, Joshua. **What Makes Us Happy.** Atlantic Monthly, June 2009 Currently available online at <http://www.theatlantic.com/doc/200906/happiness>

For more than 70 years, Harvard University researchers have been collecting data on a group of its male students to gain some insights into the keys to "successful living." The collected data of what is known as the Grant Study, passed from one generation of researchers to another, amounts to a rare kind of longitudinal study. Wolfshenk is the first journalist to comb through the accumulated files and draw some conclusions about whether the data does what it set out to do. The primary researcher on the study for more than forty years says the lives of the 268 subjects, half of whom are now deceased, "were too human for science, too beautiful for numbers, too sad for diagnosis and too immortal for bound journals." On a more tangible level, researcher George Vaillant did identify a number of factors that seemed to mark a healthy transition from middle age to a healthy old age: education, stable marriage, not smoking, not abusing alcohol, some exercise, and healthy weight. Of those who had most of these factors in their favor at age 50, half arrived at the age of 80 as happy and well.

IA49 KnowPrivacy: The Current State of Web Privacy, Data Collection, and Information Sharing. [U.C. Berkeley, School of Information]. June 3, 2009.

http://www.knowprivacy.org/report/KnowPrivacy_Final_Report.pdf

Online privacy and behavioral profiling are of growing concern among both consumers and government officials. In this report, we examine both the data handling practices of popular websites and the concerns of consumers in an effort to identify problematic practices. We conclude by offering potential solutions to realign privacy practices with consumers' expectations.

IA50 Pollard, Katherine. **What Makes Us Human?** Scientific American May 2009 Currently available online at <http://www.scientificamerican.com/article.cfm?id=what-makes-us-human>

Comparisons of the genomes of humans and chimpanzees are revealing those rare stretches of DNA that are ours alone. Chimpanzees are the closest living relatives of humans and share nearly 99 percent of our DNA. Efforts to identify those regions of the human genome that have changed the most since chimps and humans diverged from a common ancestor have helped pinpoint the DNA sequences that make us human. The findings have also provided vital insights into how chimps and humans can differ so profoundly, despite having nearly identical DNA blueprints.

ECONOMIC SECURITY AND TRADE

IA51 Bourne Joel K., Jr. **The End Of Plenty: The Global Food Crisis** National Geographic, June 2009

Currently available online at <http://ngm.nationalgeographic.com/2009/06/cheap-food/bourne-text>

This special report reviews in-depth the problem of how to feed a world that is consuming more food than farmers have been producing. The combination of several factors has led to the current global food crisis. Populations in many poor countries are burgeoning, and consumers in countries experiencing new economic growth are eating more meat. There are growing demands for grain for food, animal feed and fuel. Global warming has restrained growth in yields by depleting water and soil resources. As a result, food prices have risen dramatically, and global grain reserves have dropped to record lows; the author notes that these factors ensure that food prices are not coming down soon. Although controversial, some are calling for another "green revolution", involving new seed varieties and environmentally-sound uses of fertilizer, pesticides and irrigation; it must include Africa, Bourne writes, and in half the time of it took for the first revolution that led to a reduction in widespread hunger in Asia in the 1960s and 1970s. An increasing awareness of the importance of agricultural development has led to more investing in that area by international donors and by some countries -- like Malawi -- whose leaders want to turn their nations into surplus producers.

IA52 Eichengreen, Barry **The Last Temptation Of Risk.** National Interest No. 101, May/June 2009, pp. 8-14 Currently available online at <http://www.nationalinterest.org/Article.aspx?id=21274>

Eichengreen, professor of economics and political science at the University of California, Berkeley, provides an interesting analysis of how the "Great Credit Crisis" developed, asserting that the problem lay not so much with the weakness of the underlying economic theory as with the cherry-picking by financial decision makers of the theories that supported excessive risk taking. The concept of Value at Risk, which seemingly reduced risk to a single number, led to the idea that risk could be mastered. Memories of past market crashes faded, and deregulation was "on the march." There was also pressure to conform to the accepted views rather than focus on the warnings coming from agency theory (which pointed out that compensation practices encouraged short-term thinking and excessive risk taking), information economics (which indicated that borrowers take on more risk when using other people's money), and behavioral economics (which can explain the herd

mentality that leads to bubbles, panics, and crashes). The problem was not the failure of economists but the “partial and blinkered reading” of the available literature.

IA53 Fukuyama, Francis **A Sense Of Unreality** American Interest May-June 2009 Currently available online at <http://www.the-american-interest.com/article.cfm?piece=604>

The author writes that there is a “pervasive sense of unreality” in Washington about the scale of the economic crisis facing the U.S. and the rest of the world. The current administration’s economic policy team seems to be operating, says Fukuyama, on the assumption that the problem facing the financial system is one of illiquidity and not of insolvency, and that their task is to prop up the banks until their toxic assets can be fairly valued. The problems run deeper than that, says Fukuyama, resulting from years of Americans consuming and spending more than they were saving or producing, and trillions of dollars from abroad fueling the rapid increase of debt. He points out that this is a non-partisan crisis – both Republicans and Democrats were complicit in the deregulation of the financial sector that enabled the explosion of the shadow banking economy. The crisis is primarily a failure of U.S. public policy, writes Fukuyama, and “now that the public sector is cleaning up behind them, we need to move from astonishment to a different model of capitalism if we are to fix our own economy and regain a shred of credibility on the world stage.”

INTERNATIONAL SECURITY

IA54 Milani, Abbas. **Obama’s Existential Challenge To Ahmadinejad.**

Washington Quarterly Online link to PDF full text at <http://www.twq.com/09april/index.cfm?id=337>

Comparing the relationship between the U.S. and Iran to that of the Capulets and Montagues, the author points out that, for thirty years, Iran has partially defined itself in opposition to the U.S. The election of Barack Obama defies Tehran’s stereotypical view of America. Iranian president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad is vulnerable in the upcoming election, due to mismanagement of the Iranian economy and the reduced price of oil. There are also at least three fissures in Iran’s politics: a power struggle between Ayatollahs Khamenei and Rafsanjani, a theological split regarding the role of the clergy in government, and the role of the Revolutionary Guards, which have become the wildcard of the country’s domestic politics. The regime is feeling insecure because of its isolation from the majority of the population, who feel disenfranchised, economically deprived, and viewed internationally as a pariah nation. A coalition of forces is developing around three principal ideas – the status quo is untenable, democracy is the only viable answer, and the violent overthrow of the regime is neither possible nor desirable. Says Milani, “nothing is more dangerous for the regime than the idea of normalized relations with a U.S. government that acts as a responsible but powerful member of the international community, and not its master; war helps the mullahs and prudent U.S. policy hurts them.” The Obama administration should, therefore, “reach out to Iran to promote nonproliferation and democratic processes.”

US SOCIETY AND VALUES

IA55 Dubois, Lisa A. **Uncle Sam: Scientist.** Lens. Winter 2009, pp. 4-9
Currently available online at <http://www.mc.vanderbilt.edu/lens/article/?id=214>

During the past century, America reached the pinnacle of science and technology, thanks in no small measure to its immigrant spirit, diversity and genius for innovation. The U.S. outstripped all other countries in the number of science-related Nobel prizes awarded, in bringing new biotechnical products to the market, and in the amount of money spent on basic research. However, at the beginning of the 21st century, America's position of strength can no longer be taken for granted, hindered by the triple-whammy of reduced federal funding for basic research, a flagging biotech industry, and a public education system rife that is failing to turn on young people to careers in the sciences. The author believes that this can be changed if new federal investment in basic research can shore up a struggling economy. DuBois fears that, without investment in science and education, the United States will become a second-rate country.

IA56 Knapp, Jeffrey. **Legal Research: An Introduction To Key Online And Print Sources.** Choice vol. 46, no. 8, April 2009, pp. 1439//1449

The author, a librarian with Pennsylvania State University, Altoona, offers a basic overview of the legal process, a collection of resources for finding primary and secondary sources of legal information, resources for understanding the legal process, and resources specifically tailored for legal research. The essay is divided into two parts -- focusing on how a law is made and recorded, and aids in researching the law. Law reviews and legal periodical articles provide interpretation of the law as well as detailed articles on particular legal topics. These interpretations may be found through indexes (e.g. Index to Legal Periodicals). There are also a number of specialized finding tools that enable one to search for relevant materials in primary authorities, like the index volumes for statutes and regulations compilations. Shepard's Citations provides references to when cases and law review articles were cited by another source. Computer databanks (Lexis, Westlaw) and the free Thomas (from the Library of Congress) provide the legal profession with quick and efficient tools to do research. State and specialty law collections pulling together diverse types of authority are now appearing on CD-ROM and the Internet and today, foreign law and international law are included in many legal portals. The study of law is a highly interdisciplinary endeavor that requires invaluable resources for the study of many of its subjects. Law and governmental sources are the foundation upon which we base our civic knowledge.

IA57 **Diplomas and Dropouts: Which Colleges Actually Graduate Their Students (and Which Don't).** [American Enterprise Institute]. June 2009.

<http://www.aei.org/docLib/Diplomas%20and%20Dropouts%20final.pdf>

This report documents the dramatic variation in graduation rates across more than 1,300 of the nation's colleges and universities, even between those with similar admissions criteria and students. Using official U.S. Department of Education graduation rates, this report identifies the top and bottom performers among institutions that have similar levels of admissions

selectivity, as reported in the widely used Barron's Profiles of American Colleges. Though completion rates increase as one moves up the selectivity scale, it shows that within each category of selectivity, there are large differences between the schools that graduate most students and those that graduate few. While student motivation, intent, and ability matter greatly when it comes to college completion, the analysis suggests that the practices of higher education institutions matter, too. The institutions covered in this report run the gamut from large, public research universities to small, private liberal arts colleges; from highly selective, world-famous institutions to regional, open admissions ones. America's college graduation rate crisis is not happening at the handful of institutions that admit only a few of their applicants and graduate most—it is happening at a large swath of institutions that admit many but graduate few.

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