

The Butterfly Ballot

The election for president of the United States this November 4th is the most critical election in the past 50 years. The U.S. stands at a precipice. It's emotional, financial and moral resources have nearly collapsed, having been squandered by the divisive and misguided policies of the recent past.

Looking at the biological resources of the U.S., we see a pattern — ignoring rational, science-based knowledge and exploiting resources for short term gain, passing on to our grandchildren a world of biological crisis. On a large scale, the major problems of the earth, such as the non-sustainable levels of human beings leading to climate change and other disasters, are claimed not to exist. On a small scale, when NABA petitioned the USFWS to list Miami Blues as endangered, although this formerly common and widespread species was down to one known colony, the U.S. government rejected the petition. How can a formerly common and widespread species be more endangered than to be known from only a single colony threatened by hurricanes and other habitat disturbances? The answer is that for far too long the laws and the Constitution of the U.S. have been ignored.

Collective inertia causes people to view themselves in the same way that they saw themselves in years gone by. Most Americans still view the U.S. as the nation with the most freedom, with the greatest opportunity to succeed using one's innate talent and drive, and with a population that is the best educated. Perhaps this is still true. But here are some facts to consider.

1. Freedom. Roughly one out of 751 living in the United States is in prison. The only other major industrialized nation that even comes close is that beacon of freedom, Russia, with 627 prisoners for every 100,000 people. England's rate is 151; Germany's is 88; and Japan's is 63. The median among all nations is about 125, roughly a sixth of the American rate. (Source: Liptak, A. 2008. Inmate Count in U.S. Dwarfs Other Nations. *New York Times*, April 23, 2008).

2. Opportunity. We believed that unlike in class-stratified European societies, in the U.S. people could succeed on the basis of their own merits. It turns out that this is no longer true. If you are born into the poorest 20% of the population in Germany, you now are 1.5 times as likely to become wealthy compared to a person born into the poorest 20% of the U.S. population. If you are born in Canada, your chances of moving up in social class are 2.5 times that of someone born poor in the U.S. (Source: Corak, M. 2006. "Do Poor Children Become Poor Adults? Lessons from a Cross Country Comparison of Generational Earnings Mobility." *Research on Economic Inequality*, 13 no.1: 143-188.).

3. Education. Net exportation of hip cultural resources, such as music and movies, will not survive long into the time of Chinese economic hegemony. To produce real items, a population that understands science and mathematics is required. A comparison of peoples' views in 34 countries finds that the U.S. ranks near the bottom when it comes to public acceptance of evolution. Only Turkey ranked lower. Only 40% of Americans accept evolution compared to 80% of Icelanders and Danes and 70% of Spaniards and Germans, who apparently have a much better fundamental grasp of reality. (Source: Miller, J.D., et.al. 2006. Public Acceptance of Evolution. *Science*, 313: 765-766)

Clearly, we need to change the downhill course of the U.S. We are focused on butterflies and so we should consider which candidates for President and Vice-President would best care for and nurture defenseless butterflies. Because if we can save butterflies we can save the planet. Myself, I will be donating money to the slate of my choice and plan to work for their election. I strongly urge you, to the extent possible, to do the same. Your grandchildren's future depends upon it.

