



DECORUM

DIFFERENCES THAT MATTER

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May 2023

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Decorum.

It encompasses a good many attributes and characterizes a wide array of ways we live together: social, community, public, political.

Its synonyms and antonyms, applied to social experiences are revealing.

etiquette, socially acceptable behavior	the WHAT of life
decency, morality	the WHY of life
propriety, manner	the HOW of life

Decorum is not protocol — which I think of as a way to display social status and hierarchy.

Decorum does not assume respect for others, though it entails awareness of others. There is nothing inherently good about changes in decorum. Changes are no more than alterations in the standards for participation. Some I find helpful, some not. Some standards are just mystifying,

Decorum is an experience. One can sense it. It is evidently present or alarmingly, it has disappeared ... Well that's what these essays are about.

INTRODUCTION — In Japan I met a man

In Japan I met a man and we began to talk. We were in the garden at Hohoko-ji, a favored temple in Kamakura. His family were behind us in the queue to get in and once again just leaving the tea pavilion. Brief conversations in foreign countries with surprising connections are not that rare.

Who was he? He works in Portland Oregon. Oh we'd worked at Evergreen for over 40 years. Did we know Belfair? Well yes indeed, since it's a small town less than 50 miles from Olympia, even further out into the boonies in Washington State. Well that's where he went to High School. How about his work now? He is at a non-profit with a project to advise state governments in both Washington and Oregon on how to strengthen their handling of youth problems. As far as he could tell Japan's situation with drugs and youth violence was really different. Oh, said I, that's where I began my work in Japan over 20 years ago. And yes Japan is really different.

He tried to take down my email address, using the latest in smart phone dictation software to send me an email, so we could talk further. The email never arrived. Which I regret because I was really looking forward to talking longer. Much longer. If anyone up in the Northwest knows a tall man called Zach who fits this description, do connect us.

Before the two of us went our separate ways, I said something like "Japanese teens are not that far out of step with their elders, so if you want to learn more during the rest of your time in Japan, you can do so just by watching what adults do."

Young couples walking the streets in Kyoto wearing kimono prompted that comment. Holding hands — that's not what old people do, but the kimono make a respectful bridge to the elders. Twenty three years ago many young people were dying their hair bright colors, sparking outrage in politicians. Looking carefully, however, one could see that their mothers too, were dying their hair, soft browns and quiet auburn. Older men in Japan, China and Korea also dye their hair because grey hair signifies that it's time to retire from public life. Hair dye was opening doors to three quite different kinds of social space but each had doors that needed opening.

The more I thought about what I had said, the more I realized the USA is similar. Watch what adults do and it's not that hard to understand how young people in this country are the way they are, both in excellence and when not so excellent. Because I have lived a doubled life, young in the UK older in the USA, I began pondering if same proposition holds true in the place I grew up.

So instead of my talking to Zach, you get to read this. It's in the same format as earlier pamphlets, with the segment headings in use since the first issue over six years ago. This one is about the wider world, as they all are. It's about public life and the ways we act in society but . . . as I start to write this time, each of these familiar themes feels rather different, probably because this time the impetus to write comes in the form of a question raised by someone else. So thank you Zach. I do wish I could send you a copy.

The Art of British Decorum

The frame on the title page of this pamphlet is the frame which surrounds invitations to the coronation of King Charles III and Queen Camilla. It is pretty and also deeply interwoven with British cultural traditions. The dominant image, the Green Man, is an ancient British spiritual symbol. There are also a couple of heraldic shields — one for each of the monarchs and many detailed drawings of British nature, creatures and flowering plants, each item with its own symbolic meaning. Brits are really good at intricate ceremony.

We were in London, by chance, for the Queen's funeral. Anyone who chose to watch TV would have seen decorum layers and layers deep at the official level. One of Rob's cousins is Lord Lieutenant of a county in Scotland. At the vigil in Edinburgh he was among the men in green with pheasant feathers in their caps. One has to be invited into membership in that kind of Royal guard. His son has already been invited. The Lord Lieutenant stands in for the monarch whenever the monarch cannot be present in person. Lieutenant from French, literally "place holder."

In the UK people at all social levels know almost all of this. Kings and Queens at least for the last century have been part of ordinary people's daily life everywhere, every day. There's a photo of Elizabeth the Queen Mother on the steps of St. Paul's School in London (the girl's school) and there am I aged 5 right next to the bottom step. I happened to be "form leader" that month or something. We called all of our teachers "ma'am," explained to us as I remember it, so that we would be at ease if we ever did in fact meet the Queen. We were even marked (graded) on "deportment," one part posture, one part manners, one part doing what we were told to without the wrong kinds of resistance. The Royal Family show up everywhere, at schools and hospitals, gardens and factories, prisons and canals, horse races and coal mine disasters. The media shows them most often in glamour poses, but ordinary Brits meet them in their home towns or nearby. The Queen is described as having regularly said to people on a rope line "did you come far?" A brilliant question which allows the visitor to shine while the Queen just listens.

What stands out from our time in London during the funeral is the sense that people all over that enormous city knew exactly how to behave with the necessary decorum. Bringing flowers to honor her — put them in tidy circles around the base of the trees in Green Park. Walking from Westminster Tube to the National Gallery, don't disturb the rank upon rank of people lined up against waist-high crowd fencing, who arrived maybe 8 hours before the Queen's hearse would drive by on its way to the Lying in State. The people greeting the hearse? Why the Speaker of the House of Commons, because Westminster Hall is on Parliamentary ground. She was, after all, a constitutional monarch. Chat with the man wrangling the huge boom camera to record the car as it travels through the arch from Horse Guards Parade. He's done a lot of royal events. They are everyday fare for him. The queue of ordinary people waiting to get into the Lying in State runs along the south side of the Thames and it takes 14 hours to get to the front. 14 hours of quiet, continuous shuffling, popping out to get a cuppa or use one of the hundreds of portable loos, and everyone around you in the queue knows you can come right back to your own place.

I suppose it lasted a week. Tranquil, respectful, cheerful, social, important, a big liminal moment as the country moved from having a Queen to no longer having her. Oh it wasn't all "and is there

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honey for tea dear?” There were huge metal walls at strategic crossings no doubt in part for crowd control but also for security. There were extra police, brought in from all over the country, but they were more chatty than frightening. Some must have had guns but they weren’t prominent. I never once got a sense that I was among people whose decorum was fragile.

Lest anyone imagine that British decorum is always stuffy and quiet, I recommend spending an hour or two watching the 2012 London Olympic’s Opening Ceremonies. That too was a time when London was crammed with people. Everywhere citizen hosts wearing enviable purplish/magenta jackets were offering thousands and thousands of visitors guidance and hospitality. It lasted weeks and weeks and decorum then never faltered either.

Boris Johnson was finally axed not for his dreadful policies but for the audacity and the frequency with which he violated Ministerial decorum. It’s a country which will put up with a good deal, provided everyone else is putting up with it too. World War II and rationing for example. Or the radical deterioration of the train system in the 1960s. Or even the devastating consequences of austerity and underinvestment in the NHS in the last 12 years of Tory rule. But disdain decorum and it will bring you down; in Boris Johnson’s case the decorum accepted as essential in COVID times. “No inessential travel” had done in Dominic Cummings, Johnson’s prime advisor. Partying with colleagues and drinks on the terrace, violating “social distancing” was what brought down Boris.

The sense of decorum across the entire country for the funeral was palpable, even among staunch Republicans, as the anti-monarchists are called in the UK . They will be more in evidence at the coronation this May 6 but everyone accepts that they must be allowed to be in evidence. That’s what British Liberty stands for. If their decorum breaks down feelings could change. Over that weekend in May there will be plenty to see and I plan to watch some. Though my politics incline to equality, I have a lot of respect for the way Britain carries out the transfer from one head of state to the next. The transfer really matters. And yes, I will get to Jan 6 later on.

Naming a New Emperor (Japanese: 令和, RE:WA)

We witnessed another royal transition in Japan in 2019 when that country transferred the imperial title from the Emperor we called Akihito whose reign was known as the HEISEI era (Japanese: 平成, English: "become peace)" to his son Naruhito whose reign is now known as the REIWA era. I had known since Akihito became Emperor that he had his own “reign name.” His father Hirohito’s years on the throne were known as the SHOWA era. I even knew that after death the name Hirohito would disappear and he would be for ever Showa.

I had not anticipated how intensely ordinary Japanese people would care about the choice of the name for the new Emperor’s era. From now on it defines his life time. No-one will call him by this or indeed any personal name in public. He is just The Emperor, or His Imperial Majesty. No Elizabeth for him. After he dies he personally will become Reiwa. For now it is an era.

The naming of this reign, May 1 2019, became a huge public event, and took place exactly one day after the father abdicated. Crowds gathered around every public television screen for the

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announcement. A man of positively Confucian appearance was identified as having chosen the name. The moment it was announced it had to be explained because few in Japan know archaic Japanese words. Then the media pounced. Interviews with “this person on the street” (they always use the words “this person,” no names). Expert commentaries from scholars to elucidate and translate the term. Questions about the role played in its selection by Japan’s tradition-bound and quite nationalistically inclined late Prime Minister, Abe. No-one talked about Naruhito having had any say in being identified as the REIWA Emperor.

So what does REIWA mean? According to the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs it translates as “beautiful harmony.” It is really worth looking at the Wikipedia page on this. It reads just like a page MOFA might put up though the editing history does not support such suspicions. Its photos, below, are almost identical to the ones I myself collected from TV screens that same day:

Announcing the Name

Crowds watching the Announcement



Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga 



Japan neither revels in nor reveals the actual installation ceremonies for a new Emperor. No-one except their Shinto priest guardians ever sees the Imperial Regalia. No Japanese would have any interest in regalia that features material items originating in another country so, unlike Britain today, there are no debates about whether jewels in crowns should be returned to their “rightful” owners. There’s no need for any kind of public regalia if one has an event as riveting to the general public, as genuinely riveting as the Naming Reveal for an entire era.

Inaugurating a US President

We took ourselves to Washington DC for the Presidential Inauguration of Barack Obama in 2009. The fact that the country could elect this kind of new President was inspiring and represented real change after the quite agonizing GW Bush years. Back then we knew less about Michelle while Barack himself proved less miraculous once we got to know him. Regardless, the chance to be part of the public undertaking that is a Presidential Inauguration was too wonderful to miss.

So we went, staying with cousins in inner Maryland, taking the Metro into town. The spirit on that train was so in tune with the occasion: sombre, excited, cheerful, well dressed and ready. The Mall

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was crammed but well set up, like a vast medieval cathedral, space for any and all who chose to come. Plenty of television screens: we were all far too far away to actually hear the words or see the people with our own senses. My one regret is the rather raucous cheer the crowd sent up, which I joined, as GW's helicopter took off and flew over the Mall. We should not have done that.

In all other ways the ceremonial went just as it should have. The day ended with a new President. Though not crowned till 2023, Charles III became King of England in 2022, the second Elizabeth was pronounced dead. I have no idea when Naruhito became Emperor. Perhaps on the day he lost his name and became the Reiwa era.

American processes reveal that this society also has to depend on visible ritual to transform vital shared realities. In personal life we sense that dependence during marriage rituals. On entering the ceremonial space one is not married. By the time one leaves after the last event ends, one is married. It is an astonishingly large change in our circumstances, of which one only learns the full scope bit by bit. Presidents spend more than two months awaiting their change. What an astonishing idea!! In early November the winner learns they have won. It takes until mid January, and an oath recited in front of a judge (just like many a marriage ritual) to complete the transformation from "elected" to President. One day of ritual, undertaken with right decorum is what it takes to complete an enormous change for the entire country.

Rituals commonly gain potency from attending witnesses. That is why we were in DC in January 2009. Donald Trump as President broke with the decorum of rituals for Inauguration both on the day he became President and again on the day he left office. Referring to that first day he lied twice, claiming it had not rained as he spoke and then that there were more witnesses to his inauguration than had ever attended. Decorum can require an audience not to question some statements, until the child says it out loud, "the Emperor has no clothes." Trump has not seemed to mind being caught thus and, because he did not mind in January 2017, decorum was damaged.

If in 2017 decorum was ruffled, it was not torn. Four years later, having already put the USA through the Capitol Riot, Trump's refusal to participate in Joe Biden's inauguration was both a perilous threat to our politics and a violation of a core ritual. Charles could be crowned once his mother was buried. The Reiwa Emperor is Japan's only Emperor, his father having abdicated. Trump's refusal, by flouting American decorum conveys clearly that he refused to quit, so in 2020 the Bidens quite literally, slid into the White House by a side door. That is what happens when decorum fails.

Thinking back about Japan's models of decorum, I could just as well have suggested to Zach that he watch elementary age Japanese kids riding the Tokyo subway in their school uniforms, confident in their posture and purpose. In the presence of the Queen Mother I knew just what to do. So do most American kids. They repeatedly get told that it's their responsibility to chose well. No-one will do it for them. Sadly too many adults neither chose well nor model well for our kids.

I am willing to bet there are millions and millions of Americans, at least half the adult electorate and probably many, many more who fear that the very notion of “decorum” has completely disappeared from US civic life. In this segment it doesn’t make sense to compare the US with either Japan or the UK. Electoral politics, judicial process and legislative arenas in the three countries differ so radically from each other, comparisons are literally not worth making.

Which is not to suggest that decorum feels secure in any of the three. Japan has just swept past its second violent attempt on a leader’s life. There was plenty of that in the past but none in recent decades. None at all, in sharp contrast to US patterns of assassination and attempted assassination. In the UK in the last few years a mind-boggling number of Civil Servants, MPs and Government Ministers have gone through ethics investigations and not come through them unscathed. It isn’t even worth starting a list of cases – it would be too long.

It remains true however, that what has happened recently in Japan and in the UK is just very different from what is happening in the USA. Here one can find the collapse in civic decorum almost wherever one looks. The three in focus here, Tennessee, Thomas and Jan 6 point to problems in the States, in the Judiciary and in Federal elections.

There is a way to think about the civic life in the USA which leads one to say “t was ever thus.” Gerrymandering of legislative districts, albeit more intensely distorted now since maps are digitized, is almost as old as the nation itself. It rests on the shoulders of slavery which, via the Founders’ Constitution, disenfranchised the entire population of slaves while at the same time rewarding slave holding States with extra House seats by including those very slaves in their census tallies. Financial arrangements of varying levels of criminality, entangled with electoral politics are also as old as the USA. Boss Tweed, La Guardia and Jimmy Hoffa to name a few of the accused. Sums of money and the technical means used to deliver that financial influence these days are orders of magnitude larger but it remains hard to argue that Bill Gates and Peter Theil are orders of magnitude more influential in civic life than John D. Rockefeller or Andrew Carnegie once were.

So what kinds of decorum have changed? And where have they changed?

States are shutting out duly elected legislators.

The physical setting where this is happening is pretty easy to identify. It is in the legislative chambers themselves. Tennessee last week, Montana this week have taken steps to strip the right to participate in legislative life from elected representatives. In both cases legislative silencing occurred after a confrontation about policy inside the legislative chambers. And yes, Federal Speaker Nancy Pelosi in the last Congress stripped Marjorie Taylor Greene of her Committee assignments for her outspoken support of the rioters while in the new Congress. Speaker McCarthy has refused to seat two outspoken Democrats on the Intelligence Committee. Neither McCarthy nor Pelosi has ever suggesting invalidating election results for US Representatives, but that is what has begun to happen in the States.

In Tennessee behavior quickly became quite drastic on both sides. Legislators, arguing in favor of more gun control after a particularly painful school shooting in Nashville, encouraged unelected

protestors to come right into the legislative chambers. For that “offense” two out of the three legislators instigating the event, the two black men but not the white woman, were expelled permanently from the legislature. “Permanent” proved to be quite temporary, because each of the local councils charged with “replacing” authority promptly reinstated the men who had been expelled. In Montana, legislative leaders are using legislative protocols day after day to prevent a particular member from participating in any legislative action at all. As I write on at the very end of April, 2023, this particular issue remains unresolved. Petitions, protests and arrests continue and the voters in one district are still without active representation.

It is foolish to hope that these are the only examples of legislative defenestration we will see.

The Judiciary

In many ways Clarence Thomas is a “one of a kind” judge, impervious to outside opinion, impervious in other words to the notion that there is a social standard, a decorum to which he should conform. Right now he is in the public eye because of a startling investigative report revealing huge dollar-value gifts from a friend of his, not one of which was declared on his financial disclosure forms.

While the failure to disclose is clearly a serious matter, it is also clear that the Justices on the Supreme Court are not subject to anything in writing that defines the ethics of full disclosure. That makes it hard to argue such gifts might be an assault on decorum. Decorum is often held in place by unwritten norms but the Supreme Court does not affirm that even those exist.

More troubling for Judicial decorum is how little anyone in the USA seems believe that Justice should be neutral. The press clearly doesn’t believe it, given most journalists’ penchant for reiterating after each decision who was the appointing President. Even Clinton, whose appointments are by now sometimes over 30 years old, still seems to be thought relevant. Reagan initiated this sad, sad trend, when he set aside ABA endorsement as a criterion for appointment.

Pair that with forum shopping and hopes for neutral justice recede still further. The group pressing the case against two medications which together create a safe option for abortion opted to “incorporate” in Amarillo, forming an organization that had never before existed so as to ensure that their case would be heard by a particular Federal Judge. Plaintiffs then have begun trying avoid neutral justice in order to receive a favorable ruling.

The Clarence Thomas story fits into fading neutrality as just one more example of offering an opportunity, only to available to the privileged, to consort informally with the Justices. In late November 2022 news coverage detailed decades of concerted attempts to shape Supreme Court opinions, and not by scholarly analysis. Not even by the widely recognized campaign of a conservative organization, The Federalist Society, to ensure a steady supply of conservative candidates for positions at all levels in the Federal Courts. No, the setting for all this special influencer work on Thomas, his colleague Alito and others is a group innocuously called the Supreme Court Historical Society. At the end of 2022 the New York Times produced evidence that over 60% of the Society’s funding came from wealthy individuals and corporations with cases before or heading to the Supreme Court.

Before moving on to the even more discouraging collapse of decorum in Washington DC on January 6 2021, we should turn away from doom-saying about judicial neutrality in the direction of Linda Greenhouse, an exceptionally wise, knowledgeable and informative opinion writer for the New York Times. She does sometimes have to send up warning signals of another organized campaign to shift the balance of justice in this country. Her latest covered recent Supreme Court rulings elevating the role of religion (read Christianity) in civic decision-making. At the same time she lays out options, examines precedent and regularly enriches my thinking and assumptions about the US Supreme Court. So I don't feel alone, just vulnerable to a Judiciary that seems to have taken down too many of the guardrails that enabled us to trust we could discern and stabilize social equilibrium, even in the midst of differences that really matter.

And then there's January 6th 2021.

The violence that overwhelmed the US Capitol grounds and finally the capitol building on January 6 is familiar terrain. In the more than two years since that day there have been endless news stories, a remarkable set of House Committee hearings, and dozens of jury trials, all thus far ending in convictions. The trials will continue. Many are waiting to hear whether Trump himself will be charged either because of his actions that day or because of his inactions. Such a trial is only one among several that might address Trump's actions in the run-up to and in the months immediately after the election.

What about decorum? Where lies the change?

It's in the violence: In citizens traveling to DC expressly for violence; in the knowledge that many among the men and women at Trump's rally on the Ellipse were armed with dangerous weapons. He said it himself and he wanted even to allow the gun toting through the metal detectors: "Their weapons are not gonna be aimed at me" as he put it while waiting on site for the rally to begin.

Guns and threats of political violence were everywhere all through that 2020 election year, which was also the COVID year and the census year, though most of us have forgotten that the census too was a highly charged civic event. Election Day itself turned out to be remarkably tranquil. Voters had mailed in ballots by the million. Election officials set up drive-by ballot drop-off stations. The voters lining up under COVID constraints were quiet and patient and by late night on Election Day enough votes were tallied in enough states to make it look as though Donald Trump might have lost.

That's when the Federal crazies developed a head of steam. But they weren't the first. Almost exactly three years ago, April 30, 2020, men from Michigan's militia groups invaded their own State



A militia group with no political affiliation from Michigan stands in front of the Governors office after protesters occupied the state capitol building during a vote to approve the extension of Governor Gretchen Whitmer's emergency declaration/stay-at-home order due to the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) outbreak, at the state capitol in Lansing, Michigan, U.S. April 30, 2020. Reuters/Seth Herald

Capitol. Even before the fall elections some of them were under arrest, charged with planning to kidnap and murder their Governor Gretchen Whitmire.

When I saw that photo of the men from that militia my heart sank. How can this be the place and this the time for such grotesque acts?

Well it was the time and though Michigan was the first, and though the behavior peaked on January 6, we are not out of the woods. Michigan and Washington DC showed us the electorate too has lost its sense of decorum. This at the same time that Judges on our highest Court refuse even to acknowledge that they should abide by a public code of ethics, while in State legislatures elected representatives are being stripped of their right to represent their own electorate.

* * *

My first years in this country passed while hostilities to the Vietnam War were at their height. I arrived less than a year after the catastrophic 1968 Chicago Convention. Other places cities burned. Many turned their backs on the troubles believing that if only people would “behave,” troubles would once again die away. There have even been other wars and protests, urban upheavals and difficult conventions in the more than 50 years I have lived here. It’s not as though violence was unheard of in the recent past.

Maybe it’s because I am getting old now, but it does seem fair to say our civic processes are more seriously disturbed now than they were in the ‘60s and ‘70s. Crucially, the trouble are emanating most powerfully from those in leadership positions. Oh they aren’t the ones carrying the AR15s themselves, but they are passing laws that make it legal to carry a gun into a legislative building, (yes that was legal in Michigan) while at the same time banishing legislators who bring in an unarmed group of protesters yearning for a life with fewer guns.

If I were handling charges for the January 6 uprising, I would bring to an end the minor prosecutions of people in the Capitol building, Enough already. We and they know they did wrong. But I would still charge Donald Trump.

Not for his inflammatory rhetoric on the Ellipse. No. For his dereliction of duty.

Decorum is not passive and inert. It demands right action at the right time and place: What, Why and How. Trump spent that awful afternoon on January 6 doing nothing. Except he was watching it all explode on TV, sitting in the Oval Office Dining Room. That day, because he was under oath as President, Trump broke our social norms more energetically than anyone else.

Standards for public decorum are not gone for ever, but that one day has left this society with a lot to relearn. A hugely important truth: what one FAILS to do matters just as much as that our right actions be done with the right manner and for the right reasons. I also consider it all too likely that, in bringing guns into the Michigan Legislature, those men were asserting, perhaps for the very first time, that they too have the right to participate in public life.

WOMEN'S WORK Baseball, Football, Golf – sport by sport, notes on varieties of decorum

Zach and I didn't talk sport. In any longer conversation we surely would have. In both Japan and the USA sports, national teams, local teams, championships and the Olympics are prominent in the media and in people's social lives. And sports in both places play a large role in developing in young people some of the critical elements of what I am calling decorum: dress codes, manners in the presence of others, fairness, striving for excellence. Furthermore sporting events are laden with rituals that set tone even when they don't affect the outcome.

With women's participation on the rise, at least in the USA and the UK, some elements of decorum are changing. I and other women gain from them.

In that grand bastion of maleness, Old Trafford field in Manchester, UK, our granddaughter Lyra, (seen here at a Saturday morning practice), was on the field briefly at the start of a semi-final for the 2022 Women's World Cup. Her girls' team had been selected to be the walk-on mascots for Portugal who were playing against England's Lionesses that night. This joyful event occurred in a country which banned all women from playing professional football from 1921 to 1971.



Tennis – Everyone wore white at Wimbledon until 2010, the year Serena strode on court wearing bright cerise undergarments. The Guardian's history of women's clothing at Wimbledon is blunt: "American tennis player Billie Jean King, . . . in 1965, made the headlines for her performance, not her outfits."

In some sports, though women are now included, vestiges of traditional decorum reveal that women are not yet recognized as full participants.

Golf – the LPGA and the PGA. It's not hard to guess what it means when there's a norm – PGA and a qualified norm "L"PGA. NBA and WNBA. But then there's the word signified by the L – Ladies. I don't mind "Ladies" at Wimbledon where the men are still called Gentlemen. The NBA has a qualifier word, but W stands for women. "L" in front of PGA diminishes the women it represents.

Golf – the Augusta club that hosts the Masters had not one women member until 2012. That year they inducted 2, one of whom was Condoleezza Rice. According to Sports Illustrated in 2022, there may now be as many as 6 women among the 300 members. SI asks: "How did these women gain entry to this private club? They are brilliant, strategic, driven and philanthropic. In other words, their legacies align with those of Augusta National and its membership." An astonishing claim: only 6 women have reached the level of the other 294.

March Madness 2023 – for the first time that I can remember the College Women's Basketball Championship games earned nearly equal media coverage to the mens college competition. Not gender balanced to be sure, but simply having that much coverage seemed significant especially since for March Madness 2021, a video that went viral revealed the difference in gym facilities for

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the Final Four women in San Antonio – just one small rack of weights and a couple of yoga mats, as compared to the men's set-up in Indianapolis, with a huge gym fully equipped with every machine and weight imaginable.

Sports Journalism – Locker rooms are famous in the US as centers for male bonding and banter, towel “slapping” and easy contact between players and reporters. Women journalists were denied entry to male locker rooms until judicial rulings opened that door in the late 1970s. Which is not to say that access is easy even today, nor that women are offered equal access because harassment is common and professionalism on the part of coaches and players evaporates too easily. The fairly crude decorum that worked so well “before women” has proven hard to update.

Sports decorum is changing internationally as well. At least in some ways.

Girls play cricket in India –April 26, 2023, the New York Times carried a lovely story about increasing numbers of girls in India playing cricket. It's particularly lovely because it opens with a video of them running in training, many with arms swinging just like a cricket bowler. My girls' school offered cricket in elementary grades but it is as male a sport in the UK (and its former colonies) as, here in the USA, men dominate baseball. Any women who want to participate in that kind of game in this country have been relegated to something dismissively known as “soft” ball.

Some rituals remain unchanged. Some are almost disturbing. Others are just fun.

Crowds in the stadium – I often get to hear soccer-style football games in the background at home. The crowds sing and sing. I don't find that soothing because those baritone voices echo the sounds of fascist era mobs, mobilized and monolithic. Crowds in Japanese baseball games are quieter, serenaded by a single trumpeter, both rowdy and not very tuneful. Crowds in Brazil have powerful noise-makers. Crowds during COVID were kept out of most stadiums. In Japan they were allowed in but had to wear masks and promise they would neither scream nor cheer.

Japan's unique sports include Hakone Ekiden and Sumo. The Ekiden, a two-day, intercollegiate cross country relay, depends on one of the runners being able to scale and another hurtle down 800 vertical meters on a mountain road, an experience so fast-paced and grueling that runners routinely collapse dangerously at the end. No women allowed. Similarly in Sumo, which happens to be one of my spectator favorites, but one where women's participation is literally inconceivable.

Zach – One of the differences between Japan and the USA is that women in the US these days have far more scope for expressing physical prowess than they used to. Standards of decorum that kept them out are shifting. It's uneven but real. There are signs too that women in Japan now have a bit more space. High-school age girl archers travel the subways in sweeping male-originated kimono trousers with the longest long-bows I have ever seen. For years we could hear one group cheering each other on in the roof-top gymnasium at a neighborhood girls school.

And this is our niece Abby Knapp, a world-champion gold medalist in Karate. She embodies the changing and blending of decorum across international boundaries. It would have been inconceivable 50 years ago.



IN REAL LIFE THERE'S NO INTERMISSION Decorum: drink, drunk, drugs

When Zach talked to me he probably had youth violence or drugs on his mind. I did when I first went to Japan to study differences in youth culture there and here. This segment though will be more personal than scholarly. What moves me is the sense that there is a distinctive USA I need to write about, that country which the still-British part of me stares at in astonishment.

A caveat to dispose of briefly and immediately. Many people in both Japan and the UK crave and use alcohol in destructive and even collectively troubling ways. Think required office izakaya drinking after hours. Think football British fans heading across the channel. Both societies even have their own versions of drug “problems.”

Decorum in the USA, a world suffused with alcohol and drugs, that's a different matter with its own particular order of magnitude.

I am no specialist. I am a person with professional experience as a college “Grievance Officer” — violations of the student conduct code were my concern. I also have a family and a daily life which encounters things that matter. Let me begin there.

Fifty-six years ago (and I am now 74) I saw my first table covered with an array of gallon bottles of alcohol: gin, vodka, whiskey and bourbon probably, at a party in our honor in Madison, Wisconsin. Nothing but academics, some younger (our age) and others older, my mother's age. Clearly nothing special, for the USA. My British eyes just stared. Alcohol taxes would have made such a table in London worth not a King's ransom but a huge sum of money.

Fast forward about 10 years and by then it was clear that my American sister-in-law had a drinking problem, a serious one. I write about her now with some freedom because she is no longer alive. Nor is her cousin Caroline Knapp who wrote a wildly successful book with the title “Drinking: A Love Story.” It was written when she was sober but it covers decades of a life as what I learned to call a High Functioning Alcoholic. Rob's family abounds with them. His parents drank what they thought of as moderately but it was twice a day cocktails with wine at dinner. His aunt and uncle, their neighbors had much the same habit. They were members of a club where everyone drank freely every single weekend. All of which might be judged manageable, except that two of that family died too young, after having drunk far too much for far too long.

Just one suggestion on my part that there might be less drinking when Rob's sister came to stay her father dismissed out of hand. I would now say he too was dependent, in an altogether different way, so tolerating a week without alcohol was out of the question.

Fifty-four years ago, when I arrived in the USA for a longer stay for graduate school, there was plenty of pot to be had in any elite college one happened to visit. In my case that meant Penn, Harvard and Yale. I assume there was plenty at Carnegie Mellon as well. That's where Rob worked, though perhaps the techies were less interested. Certainly the campuses I was visiting were suffused in a way I simply had not experienced at Oxford in the three years before.

Fast forward 30 years and I was working as Grievance Officer on a campus where the housing was largely occupied by people for whom drinking would be an age-related crime and drug use would have been quite simply be a crime.

IN REAL LIFE THERE'S NO INTERMISSION Decorum: drink, drunk, drugs

Actually Evergreen was not a troubling place, at least in comparison with other campuses I heard about in my professional circuit. We had neither a Football Team, nor a system of fraternities and sororities. Nor did we take a major mid-semester break in the early spring, because our academic year was divided into quarters, so our students were off when few others were.

Alcohol and other mind altering substances abound in all those venues. Of course they do. They always have. This is traditional America at its most traditional. The highest status visitors to any major stadium are treated to free alcohol and excellent seats they rarely use, in club zones that only they can access. First class plane passengers get free alcohol too, of course, but the university as a training zone in advanced alcohol consumption feels very particularly American.

Part of the problem of course is the strictness of the bans on public alcohol use for anyone younger than 21, in most states. No "pub gardens" in America. No cafes as in Italy where wine on a table is just as likely as water. Oh American kids are allowed into restaurants that serve alcohol but they cannot be seated at the bar.

So, free of age constraints, young Americans dig in. At universities, on the cusp of adulthood, learning to drink heavily is a prominent, highly touted part of their educational endeavors.

Furthermore, adults long past university age invest particularly heavily themselves in that part of university life which is laden with alcohol. Fraternities keep the loyalties of many alumni for decades. College sports fandom is wildly popular, so much so that Americans who never even went to university create fantasy alignments with teams every year, both for the football championships in the fall and the March Madness basketball season.

Though I have never felt pressured to drink myself, I cannot help feeling sorry for all those students who realize that to be cool is to drink, never mind the handful whose lives are utterly upended, or even ended by fraternity hazing rituals.

Decorum in alcohol use exists. There's plenty of it. Perhaps it feels odd to even use the word decorum which is so often associated with restraint. And yet to me it feels like the correct word.

Young people, whether they are on the beaches of Florida in March or at Fraternity Rush in October realize that to be a member of this particular social group one must be ready to get drunk.

Older people in country clubs or at a baseball game ought to head for the bar, for a cocktail or a beer. In the luxury box of course, they only have to wait for a quiet attendant to take an order.

Or if you are at dinner with family, it's inappropriate to suggest for the sake of someone's long term health that alcohol should not be served.

In my life in America, which now includes membership in the Rotary, it's impressive how many times event organizers include alcohol to lure participants. TGIF of course, but also other times.

Drugs?? I cannot speak to these issues nearly as fully. Just a few thoughts then about the decorum associated with drug use in some of the worlds I intersect with.

IN REAL LIFE THERE'S NO INTERMISSION Decorum: drink, drunk, drugs

College students? Well these days marijuana is no different than alcohol – same age restrictions in Washington State with the same use and possession limits. The biggest change is that students over 21, of whom there are many at Evergreen, must now be permitted to grow their plants right on their windowsills. The standards of decorum have changed.

Big Pharma? Their participation in the creation of drug dependency has had effects at least as devastating as any cartel south of the border. The Sacklers as patrons of museums and collections of Asian artifacts crossed my horizon decades ago. A few years ago, my sister gave a high status speech in Washington DC at a Smithsonian Museum when it was still known as the Freer-Sackler Museum of Asian Art. It has been a real struggle to strip that family of their public standing. That Smithsonian museum is now named, as it should always have been, National Museum of Asian Art.

People living under bridges? They abound in the Bay Area and are usually explained as proof that liberal cities have no morals. I argue that their presence is better explained as a wise decision by those with no homes. Bridges are protective and the weather here is safer than elsewhere if you have no walls. What I find deeply disturbing, deeply deeply disturbing is that bridge living is so very filthy. Tent encampments in Japan were spotless. The dirt I associate with minds that can no longer see what is happening around them. Decorum? Even here it exists but what it says about us Americans and our companions in this society leaves my British side deeply, deeply troubled.

Have I said anything here that would be helpful to Zach? Well I have offered – some evidence that Japan is indeed different. I hope I have made something of a case that the USA is the way it is because adults make it so. It's not that the young have gone off the rails but rather that they are following in their own styles right down the tracks earlier generations laid down. Just as they do in Japan and also in the UK.

BIO Helena Meyer-Knapp is a scholar/activist and an immigrant. Her work centers on how groups of people persuade themselves to stop fighting. She earned a BA in History at Oxford in the UK, the country of her birth, and an MA in Communications and Ph.D. in Interdisciplinary Political Studies in the USA. She was a member of the faculty (International Relations and Political Studies), 1984 - 2017 at the Evergreen State College. Since 2001 her research has taken her regularly to NE Asia, most often to Japan but also to South Korea.

An activist in public affairs since the 1970s, her interests lie in local and national elections and in international peace-making. Her public work in the early 1980s centered on leadership in the Campaign for a Nuclear Weapons Freeze. In teaching Political Studies she stressed the importance of engagement in public life, encouraging students to gather the materials, the skills and the momentum they personally needed to participate in their communities on their own behalf.

