



Aldous Huxley

## Our Brave New Year

*“Great is the truth, but from a practical point of view, still greater, from a practical point of view, is silence about truth” .*

*“One believes things because one has been conditioned to believe them.”*

*“If one’s different, one is bound to be lonely ... Well, I’d rather be unhappy than have the false happiness you were having here”.*

(Aldous Huxley, **Brave New World**)

On January 12<sup>th</sup>, President Barack Obama, considered by pollsters to be the most polarizing Chief Executive in recent history, delivered his sixth and final, State of the Union Address, which by tradition is delivered to a joint session of the United States Congress. Perhaps you can understand that many who voted for him as the candidate for “Hope and Change”, were soon confronted with the reality of “more of the same”; and even worse, as well as a stark realization that even with a change of personalities or even political parties, the overall agenda remains the same. Even the mainstream **Boston Globe** has acknowledged this reality: “Vote all you want. The secret government won’t change”. (October 19, 2014). At the beginning of this new year I don’t need to tune into to President Obama in order to know the state of our union ... All is not well, the state of our union is not good and is unlikely to improve any time soon. While the same could be said for the state of our war ravaged planet; and increasingly endangered biosphere, for now my focus will remain on our situation here in 21<sup>st</sup> century America.

Isaac Asimov (1920-1980), former Professor of Biochemistry at Boston University School of Medicine, and the author of 212 books on mostly scientific subjects, maintained that there has always been, among our many other challenges, a cult of ignorance in the United States; and that this strain of anti-intellectualism has been a constant thread winding its way through our political and cultural life. It has been nurtured by the false notion that democracy means that “my ignorance is just as good as your knowledge”. (<http://media.aphelis.net>).

In “The Great Forgetting”, prize winning journalist Chris Hedges sees this as one among other causes for our current situation given that ignorance and illiteracy come at a cost; as does obsequious worship of technology, hedonism, and power, as well as the primacy of emotion and spectacle over wisdom and rational thought. Hedges laments that a decades-long assault on the arts, humanities, journalism and civic literacy, that once helped us to interpret who we were, and are, and our place in the world, have been either corrupted or relegated to the margins. As a result we have surrendered judgment for prejudice and created a binary universe of “good us versus evil others”. Hedges continues to lament our surrender of judgment for prejudice as we have unleashed our colossal capacity for violence around the globe and into the city streets of our own poorest communities. Moreover, he warns, any marriage of ignorance and force always generates unfathomable evil; unseen by perpetrators who mistake their own stupidity for blindness and innocence. ([opednews.com](http://opednews.com), January 11, 2016).

Stanford University science historian Robert Proctor, delivers a similar message. “We live in a world of radical ignorance and the marvel is that any kind of truth cuts through the noise.” Even though knowledge is accessible, it doesn’t mean that it is accessed. As he was delving into the practices of the tobacco industry and how they spread confusion about the carcinogenic and other lethal potentials of their products, Proctor created a neo-logic for the study of the deliberate propagation of ignorance: agnotology. Derived from *agnosis*, the neo-classical

Greek word for ignorance or not knowing, and ontology, a branch of metaphysics which concerns the nature of being. So, agnotology is now understood as “the study of willful acts to spread confusion and deceit, usually to sell a product or to win favor”. Ignorance is power, Proctor explains, and agnotology is about the deliberate creation of ignorance; and also a political ploy by powerful entities who want us “not to know”.

As an example of agnotology in action, Proctor offers the issue of climate change. The fight, he maintains, is not over the existence of climate change but whether God has created the Earth for us to exploit, whether government has the right to regulate industry, whether environmentalists should be empowered or imprisoned and so on. This fight is not just about the facts but rather what is imagined to flow from and into such facts. As Proctor and others have clearly discerned, deceit and deception is rampant throughout both sides and even the middle of our political spectrum and this reality portends a very tumultuous year ahead. (BBC Future: January 6, 2016).