

# Communitarian Observations

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## Announcements

The deadline to submit proposals for the Society for the Advancement of Socio-Economics' 26<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference in Chicago (July 10-12, 2014) is approaching. The Communitarian Network will be organizing panels based on the following topics: 1) Can economic theory be applied to non-economic choices? *The Moral Dimension* revisited. 2) A liberal communitarian view of counter-terrorism. The purpose of SASE is to advance the understanding of economic behavior and its policy implications within the context of societal, institutional, historical, philosophical, and ethical factors. Abstracts must be submitted to the SASE staff by January 20, 2014.

On January 27, 2014, from 1:00pm-2:30pm, the Institute for Communitarian Policy Studies will hold a public meeting on [Mutually-Assured Restraint \(MAR\) for U.S.-China Relations](#) at The Murrow Room of the National Press Club, 529 14<sup>th</sup> St. NW, Washington, DC. The meeting will be co-chaired by Tu Weiming, Lifetime Professor of Philosophy and Dean of the Institute for Advanced Humanistic Studies at Peking University, and myself. Speakers to be announced. The media is invited. We hope you will consider joining us. Due to space limitations, we ask that you RSVP to [icps@gwu.edu](mailto:icps@gwu.edu).

On December 24, Amitai Etzioni was appointed to the Board of Advisors of [Compassion & Choices](#), the nation's oldest and largest nonprofit organization working to improve care and expand choice at the end of life.

## Short Pieces

"Making more explicit that which is viewed by many as an implicit understanding between China and the United States regarding the status of Taiwan would constitute a major step in defusing tensions between the two powers. The governments of both China and the United States have already shown considerable restraint in this matter, ignoring demands from Chinese who wish to use force to "reclaim" Taiwan as part of the mainland and from Americans who call for recognizing Taiwan as an independent nation. These measures of self-restraint should be made more explicit, by letting it be known that as long as China does not use force to coerce Taiwan to become part of the People's Republic of China (as it did with Tibet), the United States will continue to refrain from treating Taiwan as an independent state." (Read more of "The Benefits of Being Clear on Taiwan" at the [ICPS website](#) or at [The Diplomat](#).)

"Transparency is the Vitamin C of politics. It does some good under limited circumstances, but can cause harm if used as an alternative medicine when real treatments are needed. Though always popular, transparency has been much in the news recently as the [solution](#) to that which ails us. The real treatment is more regulation. The cost of healthcare is rising? The ACA requires hospitals to publicly report how much they charge for each item and procedure in the hope that consumers will use this information to 'buy' less costly treatments. Supreme Court decisions like *Citizens United* opened the floodgates for the flow of contributions by interest groups to politicians' campaign chests? Anti-corruption supporters have [latched](#) onto the ruling's upholding of political-spending disclosure requirements as the [best means](#) of keeping special interests in check. NSA surveillance programs are viewed as overreaching, ensnaring millions of Americans and tapping the personal cell phones of the leaders of friendly nations? The Obama administration has promised to be more transparent about why these programs are needed and how they really work. Transparency has long been hailed as the

foundation of democracy. [...] There is some truth in these claims, but much less than appears at first blush.” (Read more of “Transparency Is Overrated” on the [ICPS website](#) or at [The Atlantic](#).)

“The left’s eyes are glued to New York City where the Great New Hope for progressive people just took office. The fact that Mayor Bill de Blasio was elected by a wide margin, that the support in several parts of the nation for increasing the minimum wage is considerable, and that public opinion polls consistently reveal that a majority of Americans want the government to curb inequality are all viewed as promising signs that there may be a new wave of support for major social reforms. Some even see the coming of a left Tea Party that will prevent centrist Democrats and President Obama from making compromises that damage major liberal causes, in particular the protection of Social Security and Medicare as currently constituted. Alas, Mayor de Blasio was barely in office a few hours before he made his first major mistake—one that was far from accidental. He declared that ‘we are called upon to end social and economic inequalities that threaten to unravel the city we love.’ [...] The issue here is not one unfortunate speech, albeit one that received special attention because it was centerpiece of the mayor’s inauguration. The problem is [that] no one is about to ‘end’ inequality or even make major inroads.” (Read more of “For a Fair Society” on the [ICPS website](#) or at [The Huffington Post](#).)

“One of the major recommendations of President Obama’s NSA review panel is that information about who Americans called (not what they said!) should no longer be stored by the NSA, but rather by either phone companies or a third party. This may be good politics, but it is surely bad public policy. As Michael Hayden, the former head of the NSA, [told the BBC](#), this would undermine our ability to protect ourselves from terrorists and rogue nations—yet it seems necessary because unless the libertarian beast is fed some raw meat, it may devour the whole program (his point, my words). After all, the House came within a few votes of decreeing that the whole program should be defunded—i.e., killed—just months ago. Before I spell out why we would live to regret implementing this key recommendation, let me note the irony that the same group is simultaneously calling for curtailing or terminating the use of private-sector background checks for those employed in security work, which failed to flag either Edward Snowden or Navy Yard shooter Aaron Alexis. Just as the group is criticizing the private sector’s security procedures, it calls for handing the very same sector a mission now carried out by the NSA! Although we have hard evidence of the damage done to national security by relying on the private sector, we do not know of a single person who has actually been harmed by NSA collection of phone records. Not one.” (Read more of “The NSA Panel’s Pointless Private-Sector Fig Leaf” on the [ICPS website](#) or at [The Atlantic](#).)

### Long Pieces

Etzioni, Amitai. “[Political Corruption in the United States: A Design Draft](#).” *Political Science & Politics* 47(2014): 141-144. *Abstract: To establish the scope and level of corruption in the contemporary United States, a collaborative project of political scientists is called for. Such a study best start with explicating the definition of corruption various scholars employ. Three are here employed: using public goods for personal gains, deflecting public goods to private groups, and making such moves when they are legal but illicit. To assess corruption on all these levels, we must take into account that various forms—outlined below—that ‘capture’ takes beyond the corruption of the laws themselves. A study of the major differences in the level of corruption among the three branches of government may help deepen our understanding of the prevalence and causes of corruption. A study of ‘rent’ may help predict that future course of corruption. Other facets to be studied are merely listed as topics whose study warrants collaborative investigation.*

### My Diary

*The Letters of Arthur Schlesinger, Jr.* (New York: Random House, 2013), edited by Andrew Schlesinger and Stephen C. Schlesinger, features correspondence from Schlesinger in which he criticizes the concept of community inherent to communitarianism.

### I Read

Lindberg, Tod. *Making Sense of the 'International Community.'* (Washington, DC: Council on Foreign Relations Press, 2014). This publication is part of the International Institutions and Global Governance program and was made possible by the generous support of the Robina Foundation.

An article by Tina Rosenberg in the *New York Times* recently drew attention to the health benefits of community in its discussion of a pregnancy checkup performed for eight women in a group. "Being part of a community, research shows, is also good medicine. The idea behind [the Centering Healthcare Institute] is to help mothers—especially low-income mothers—become more involved in their own care, to acquire the skills and confidence to take care of themselves and their babies, and to have a community. Now about 300 sites around the United States use the program." The article, "The Doctor Will See All 8 Of You," appeared in the December 22 edition of the *New York Times*, and can also be read at the *New York Times'* [online opinion pages](#).

Peggy Noonan noted the "plight" of the wealthy called on to pay additional taxes in order to pay for essential social services for the community. As New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio's said in his inaugural address, she reports, "Those earning between \$500,000 and one million dollars a year, for instance, would see their taxes increase by an average of \$973 a year. That's less than three bucks a day—about the cost of a small soy latte at your local Starbucks." Hardship, indeed.

### New Endorsements

If you wish to endorse any or all of the ideas or platforms advanced by the Communitarian Network, please email [icps@gwu.edu](mailto:icps@gwu.edu).

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*For more about the communitarian project, please visit <http://icps.gwu.edu>. For more notes, please visit <http://blog.amitaietzioni.org>.*