

The rise and fall of the USA

History proves we will not be No. 1 forever



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It seems like nothing can stop the stock market. Recent news seems to suggest that the Asian market crisis may not turn out to have the dire consequences many analysts were spitting out just days ago. Instead of a heavy bear setting over the world markets, it seems that the bull will rage on indefinitely. And it's all thanks to a little nudging and wealth from the good ol' U S of A. Dang. Is there anything we can't do? Well, as a matter of fact, yes. What we can't do is stay on top

forever. This little scare hit a little too close to home for experts who have been watching Wall Street's almost absurd rise over the past few years. The old adage "what goes up, must come down" applies everywhere; the economy has its own form of gravity. Talk of a crash along the lines of that dark time that ushered in the Great Depression has been growing louder lately, with a certain element of uncertainty. After all, the world market is a very different place today than it was in the late 1920s. What could cause or avert a major financial crisis in this information age is almost impossible to tell. And we're not out of the woods yet; the Asian situation still hasn't been solved, and by the time this is printed, things could be looking dark again. But that's not really what I'm concerned about. I'll be the first to admit that I know very little about economics. (That's the only way I can call myself a socialist and keep a straight face.) But I do know a few things about history. And history says that nobody

stays No. 1 forever. Yes, that's right. Someday, the leaders of the United States will not be the big boys on the world block. Someday, we won't be able to throw our weight around economically, militarily, politically or even socially. Someday, we won't matter that much anymore. Now don't get all upset: I'm not saying that we somehow deserve this. (Although given how we do handle our global influence, there is something satisfying in the thought of us being taken down a notch or two, especially in the eyes of practically every other nation on the planet.) And I'm not even saying we'll see our nation crippled; we just won't be that important anymore. Kind of like Great Britain: It won't be a bad place to live. We'll just sort of be ... has-beens; a tourist attraction. Or maybe we'll fall hard. Who knows? Either way, the idea scares us more than a little. We're an extremely educated society, and a lot of us know that history has never been kind to those who would create an undying empire —

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the Romans, the Ottomans, the French, the British. We don't want to fall down that path. When word got out that this generation might not live better than the one before it, we flipped. It's just not the American way to be anything but No. 1, anything less than better. It flies in the face of everything we've been taught about our heritage, our abilities and our God-given place in the world. Damn it, we earned the right to consume two-thirds of the world's resources! After all, who made those resources? Who clawed their way to the top? Who did all that it takes to make something worth making? We don't deserve to go out. I could argue with that reasoning, but that's not what I'm

concerned about. It doesn't matter whether we deserve it or not; nothing lasts forever. And really, I don't mean to blare out gloom and doom. It's not that bad. And I'm not saying "Why bother?" Given careful thinking and motivation, we could remain vital for a long time. The life of a nation is a lot like the life of a person: Just because you're going to die some day doesn't mean there's no use living. But in the end, we will go down. It's just the way history works. Someday, the bull market will stop, maybe even tumble. Someday, America won't be that important, maybe even third-rate. And yes, someday, the Huskers won't be No. 1. They may even suck.

Let's not talk about sex

Laws prevent anything more than abstinence-based education in schools



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Abstinence-based sex education is in the news in a big way in Nebraska. Yes, kids, it's true. Abstinence-based sex education is the only type of sex education that will be funded by the state of Nebraska or the U.S. government. So, for all intents and purposes (unless some major corporate sponsors step forward, which seems unlikely), abstinence-based sex education is the only type of sex ed that is likely to be taught in Nebraska. Proponents of abstinence-based sex education, such as Douglas D. Christensen, commissioner of the Nebraska Department of Education, believe that abstinence-based sex education will curb the spectacle of teen-age pregnancy. As Christensen said, "It is time for adults to stand up and advocate for all children, sending a strong message that their best interests are served by abstinence." Christensen goes on to say that it is not the policy of the state board of education to mandate abstinence-only sex education. Christensen said, "Under the state board's policy, schools receiving state funds will do so only for abstinence-based programs. Local school districts may adopt other sex-education programs, but those programs would not qualify for state or federal sex-education funds." Christensen is perfectly correct when he says that individual school districts may indeed be able to adopt other sex-education programs, if they are able to come up with corporate sponsorship or similar types of "revenue enhancement"

However, any rational school district leader is going to view the position of the state board of education as a mandate, which of course it is. Any other view is solely legalistic hair-splitting. All that's needed here is to read between the lines. Nebraska school districts have been told to teach abstinence, and only abstinence, or get no funding for their programs. Nebraska is a relatively poor state with many small school districts. Does anyone here really think that any school district can afford to blow off the state and U.S. governments and "do its own thing?" Perhaps a review of abstinence-based sex education is in order. Abstinence-based sex ed is an attempt to teach early to middle adolescents to abstain from sexual involvement — to "just say no" to sex. Supposedly, abstinence-based sex education is supposed to do this through sessions that focus on instilling premarital sexual abstinence attitudes, raising self-esteem, teaching communication skills, providing reproductive knowledge and building an awareness of pressures to engage in sex. Abstinence-based sex education has a few surprising partisans, including Dr. Ruth Westheimer. Westheimer, speaking recently at the New York City Council's Education Committee meeting, said, "I believe we have to teach morality in public schools. A value-free sex-education curriculum isn't possible." However, the biggest problems is not the apparent attempt by government to legislate morals. Abstinence-based sex education is problematic in that it's abstinence-only. Information about how to prevent pregnancy by contraception is not allowed to be discussed, otherwise public funding will be lost. Information about sexually transmitted diseases (or STDs) also isn't allowed to be disseminated, except by the caveat that "if you are abstinent, you won't get any STDs." Obviously, one need not be a Rhodes scholar to figure that out! Abstinence-based sex education has been effectively countered by studies such as "An Evaluation of an Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention Program: Is 'Just Say No' enough?"

Authoried by F. Scott Christopher and Mark W. Roosa, it appeared in the journal Family Relations in Jan. 1990. As Christopher and Roosa said, "Attempts to teach early adolescents ... to abstain from sexual involvement, to 'Just Say No' to sex," tend not to work. Perhaps the main reason that they don't work is due to "insensitivity in programs that stress abstinence as the only alternative to adolescent pregnancy." As Christopher and Roosa said, "This approach ignores students who have already experienced sexual intercourse. ... Those who have experienced voluntary intercourse may be turned off by a message that suggests they have done something bad or wrong; those whose experience was involuntary (i.e., rape or incest) may find abstinence-only programs particularly upsetting." According to The Salt Lake Tribune, June 24, 1997, California sex-education researcher Douglas Kirby found that an abstinence-based sex education program called "Education Now and Babies Later" had no lasting effect on teen-agers' attitudes on when to first have sex. In case you were wondering how comprehensive this study was, it involved 187,000 California youths in 31 counties. Sex education should include more of a rational approach to human behavior. Although abstinence is the only way to be 100 percent positive of not catching a disease or getting pregnant, such approaches as preventing pregnancy and STDs by using condoms do work. Going with the abstinence-only approach, in effect, throws the baby out with the bath

water and says that only bad, immoral or stupid people want to have sex. This attitude flies in the face of conventional wisdom. When even the 80-something advice columnist Ann Landers states that the sex drive cannot and should not be countermanded (for the record, she recommends mutual masturbation or, for those of us without partners, "self-pleasuring" as a safe alternative to intercourse), that proves our society has become more accepting, realistic and liberal on this issue. Why have the conservatives seemed to win on this issue? Simple. We who know better, such as college students, fail to exercise our right to vote, and politicians summarily ignore us. Abstinence-based sex education will hurt more than it helps, by pro-

moting ignorance in favor of "values." But try proving that to a pregnant 15-year-old.



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