

Return to Wonderland

William Van Til

"Alice is back," announced the White Rabbit, out of breath as usual. Joyfully, the Mad Hatter and the March Hare poured the dregs from their tea cups upon the Dormouse. Along came Alice, accompanied by the Queen of Hearts, the Cheshire Cat, and the Dodo. They all sat down at the table.

"Tell us more about that strange place you come from," demanded the Queen imperiously. "Is it the Delighted States or the Benighted States?"

"It's the United States," corrected Alice, for she had grown up to be a schoolteacher and had learned to call things by their right names.

"Are they really United?" asked the March Hare. "Last time you were here you were telling us about troubles in the Southern part of your country."

"Oh, things are fine in the South now," said Alice. "The racial disorders have moved North. For instance, to Boston, the cradle of the American Revolution 200 years ago."

"What did the revolting Americans want?" asked the March Hare.

"Life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness," responded Alice promptly. "To promote the general welfare, insure domestic tranquillity, etc."

"Did they want those things for everybody?" asked the March Hare. "If so, why the disorders in Boston?"

"They say it's the busing that's causing the trouble," said Alice. "Big yellow buses bring children to school throughout the United States," she explained.

"If buses bring children to school throughout the United States, why can't they bring them to school in Boston?" asked the March Hare.

"Because it's really not the busing they object to," said Alice. "What they object to is their children going to school with --." She had trouble finishing.

The March Hare, who was dark-skinned, sniffed at Alice for a long time, his sensitive whiskers quivering. Then he said, "I think I get it," and moved down the table as far away from Alice as he could go. "Oh dear," thought Alice. "I think somehow I've offended him."

"I enjoy our Caucus Race," said the Dodo. "So tell me about your politics."

Alice brightened. "Our President is a nice man. Everybody likes him."

"What does he do?" asked the Dodo.

Alice thought hard. "He vetoes bills and appropriations because they cost a great deal of money."

"Maybe your country doesn't have many problems. So you don't need any bills or appropriations," suggested the Dodo helpfully.

"Oh no," said Alice. "We have lots and lots of problems! Pollution and energy depletion and crime and violence and tax fraud and conspicuous consumption and corruption and slums and urban decay and military-industrial complex and overkill and handguns and recession and inflation and monopoly and school financing and racism and civil rights and strip mining and campaign abuses and ..."

"Stop," said the Dodo. "Too many. Maybe you need a Caucus Race like we have in Wonderland where everyone begins running when he likes and leaves off when he likes."

"We've got that," said Alice. "We call it Democratic Party primaries. All the candidates run and run and attack each other bitterly but in the end none of the Democrats becomes President. Our last President was a Republican who abused his power and was forced to resign to avoid impeachment. Then the nice man who didn't run at all in any of the Caucus Races got to be President."

"Your politics are far more confusing than ours in Wonderland," said the Dodo sullenly, joining the March Hare at the foot of the table.

The Cheshire Cat inquired, "Aren't people working hard to solve those horrible problems you mentioned?"

"Some are," said Alice. "But most people don't pay much attention to them. People go around doing their own thing. The philosophers call it an absence of value agreements and sociologists talk about privatism and retribalism. People are searching for identity and trying to find out who they are."

"Don't they know who they are?" asked the Cheshire Cat incredulously. "Here in Wonderland even the Dormouse knows who he is." The Dormouse scuttled to the foot of the table and covered his identity with his paws. The Cheshire Cat slipped away too.

"Time for some Woman Talk," boomed the Queen of Hearts. "How fare the women?"

"They're liberated now," said Alice enthusiastically. "We're achieving equal rights and that's good. Something else is happening though. Marriage is becoming unfashionable. Man and women often live together temporarily and break up whenever they're inclined to have sex relations with someone else."

"So who takes care of the children?" asked the Queen.

"We haven't figured that out yet," said Alice apologetically. "Many young people also run around doing their own thing. Some are practicing the three Ds--delinquency, drugs, and deviation."

"Such bad behavior!" roared the Queen. "Off with their heads!" She flounced to the foot of the table.

"It's really not their fault," said Alice. "Somebody really ought to take care of the children."

Alice was left alone with the Mad Hatter. "Surely the schools are helping the young people deal with your problems," said the Mad Hatter. "Surely they teach more than just Reeling and Writhing and the different branches of arithmetic--Ambition, Distraction, Uglification, and Derision. He waited.

"You don't expect the schools to deal with such controversial problems, do you?" said Alice indignantly.

The Mad Hatter tried once more. "Surely your educational leaders are concerned about these problems?"

"Our -educational leaders," said Alice virtuously, "are greatly concerned about accountability, budgeting systems, efficiency, teacher welfare, and administrative reorganization."

"Do they ever ask what education is for? Aren't they concerned about the survival of your Disunited States?"

"Everybody knows what education is for," said Alice angrily.

"What?" asked the Mad Hatter.

Alice started to tell him. But the Mad Hatter moved to the foot of the table and paid no attention. "I think I'll go back to the United States," thought Alice, "where people behave sensibly."

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