

Freedom's Just Another Word

Written by Alex Baer

Wednesday, 18 June 2014 13:27

Situation Report: I steamed my eyelids open again with real coffee, a nice treat for a weekday. This idle, *schedule-less* time is a gift from my era. It is a gift from the same chunk of time that decided a long while ago that I was not only economically redundant, but execrably so, and so, I was added to the Shoals of the Doomed & Adrift -- and then expertly excreted from the highly-lauded realm of competitive, cutthroat capitalism and into the murky lagoons and mired holding ponds of Excess Capacity.

In economics, as in most other areas of America life since, oh, 1960, it's best to fog and cloud the real issues, and all-too-human effects, with cold, distancing euphemisms. So, the Shoals of the Shredded & Damned are magically converted -- *presto!* -- to Excess Capacity. Language is very much like statistics: What is revealed is routine; what is concealed is essential.

Add to this phenomenon of distancing, by language, to things we'd rather not face, one more thing: The purposeful, political maiming of language to accomplish the demands of propaganda. It's why Frank Luntz has *Luntzified* the language for right-wing think tanks, policy groups, and political hacks, converting the neutral and descriptive

inheritance tax

and

estate tax

into the now-infamous, and heinous, barbarian

death tax

.

- Same tax -- but, *now with super-massaged Ultra Spin, that marketing miracle!*

You can see the same obscene *twistifications* of language all throughout the land. If you can hide the Truth within a phrase that really riles people up like crazy, well -- then, for the most part, you

don't have to face the Truth! □ Shucks

--Thanks, Republicans!

[excuse me a moment while I mutter angrily, and incoherently, at myself, and use quite a lot of very clear language that would normally have earned me strong lectures as a child.]

Freedom's Just Another Word

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So, yes, back to the holding pond: There are a lot of us here in the lagoon, standing around, up to our eyebrows in murk and dank. We breathe through cheap, thin, red coffee stirrers, used as snorkels. We network. We send resumes. No one has left the lagoon since the Johnson administration.

- The lagoon has 21 million people in it. We could field just over 2-point-3 million baseball teams, in active players. On an active, 25-person roster, we could squeak out 840,000 teams. Add in coaches and managers and what-not, and you've got us whittled down to about half that, something under half a million teams. Less, if you count essential staff, like hot dog vendors.

That's still a lot of people to be left stranded on base from isolated fiscal policy, or picked off in an economic squeeze play. It's a lot, even in the murky holding ponds of capitalism, from which you can see the whole ball game being played. (If you've been keeping up with Wall Street antics for the last few decades, you've already got a great idea how the game is played, and how The System works -- endlessly played, endlessly worked, and seen, in the manner of financial demigods, their thousand-pound-test lines, and all the helpless fish.)

It's easier to think of things in that broad, unemotional way, sometimes, to help take some of the personal sting out of it, to know you're not alone in the lagoon. It's not much help, but it's *some* -- say, on the order of an aspirin's help during an anesthesia-free limb removal. In the end, it is easy to take some things personally, when the effect is very personal.

Still, I would recommend to anybody envisioning yourself as a becalmed, microdot pea in a storm-tossed macropod world. Occasionally, one of those pods gets blasted by lightning. *Gues s what -- your lucky day!*

Such strategies, such as they are, beat realizing one has hit yet another awkward age in life, this unexpected, unscheduled, unwelcome arrival in Time's subway station. It has been *quite* a stretch of time since the frantic itch of puberty, toward the beginning of life, and it's now *not* such a stretch of time to the enforced twitch of retirement, toward the end of life.

Time flies, and so on. Or, as the Brits say in their Underground, at the Tube: *Mind the Gap.*

Freedom's Just Another Word

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Say *Mind the Gap* here and you'll likely get a mouth-breather's stare. It's a long, parched march of time marking those two points, two dry desert wells -- where The System jettisoned you from its camel caravan across the economic desert and wastelands of capitalism, making you a non-person, and the point on the calendar where The System takes you back in once again, re-establishes you as a whole person, and proclaims your right as a human in acceptable standing, now able to retire. Congratulations. You may now get a drink of water. Maybe even retire *and* get a drink of water!

Say *Mind the Gap* here, and people will think they've heard official marketing instructions -- *No w Hear This, All Patriotic Consumers!*

-- to immediately obey all marching orders, and purchasing orders, given them, and launch a shopping offensive, to a purveyor of overpriced sweatshop garments. (This will be especially true for Banana Republicans who always huddle and school like small, frightened fish, emulating their American political cousins, turning and darting in lock-stepping, fin-slapping fashion, while trying hard to be fashionable and stand out in a crowd -- even while simultaneously trying to hide within a writhing school of their own kind. It's tough to do both, yet, they persist.)

Yes, it's quite a thing to reach some random, mystical coordinates on a calendar and have capitalism's gatekeepers silently take communal note, all together, in tandem, as if pulling coded, rank-and-file information from the air -- information apparently only *they* can receive, in their NSA-approved SkullMount 3000 (TM) "Enigma Pi-Eyed in the Sky" transceivers, tuned to the Death Sentence Channel.

- Face it: in capitalism, unemployment of any extended period, is a death sentence. He who controls your ability to clothe, feed, and shelter yourself, and your loved ones, is not simply an employer, but an overseer and overlord. Not that the *futile* system of capitalism is *feudal* of course. But this happy notion did help employers slash salaries and boot millions out of work, and continue to sleep well, in the gated castle communities on the hill.

Today, thanks to the miracle of globalization (and Ferd's First Law of Greed, that employment

Freedom's Just Another Word

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will always flee, like water, to the lowest possible levels and bottomless depths of the landscape), anyone can be hurled on the dung-heap of non-personhood, and for any number of reasons. Or for no reason at all. *Poof*, and there you are: thrown away, discarded, trash-heaped, cashiered, kicked out, let go, fallen under the ax, or allowed to seek opportunities elsewhere -- the euphemisms are legendary and are always at work --

unlike workers

-- breeding new phrases of thinly disguised, pointed humiliation and financial embarrassment.

Before you know it, there you are: At the start of the long haul, before the mythical calendar coordinates of The Golden Years are reached. Here, according to custom, you will then begin transferring any gold you might have left, from fillings to filings, to the Lords of the Rings we now call doctors, hospitals, and your newest, dearest friend, Big Pharma.

- *Do not pass Go, do not collect anything of value. □ And forget about that world cruise, while you're at it. □ Sign here, and the body mechanics will work on you. □ Hope you like beans three times a day from now on. □ And, no, Medicare does not cover Beano dietary supplements.*

(I have already traded my life savings -- and then some -- to have my life saved. I am a fan of Irony. Good thing, too. Irony keeps despair from camping on my chest. As a fan of Irony, despair merely camps out on my stoop, alternately giggling at, and chiding, me.)

Yes, if you *age-out* of Competition Land, by virtue of hair color, hair absence, or hair-raising amounts of experience, you'll have to go to the Abandoned Bus Station of The Over-Qualified, where everyone's a proven, verified expert. Here, almost everyone has a comb-over of some sort or other, whether it's above or below the scalp line -- on the hairy outside or the even hairier inside. *Could be worse -- there always the lagoon, right?*

* * * * *

I find it interesting that the standard treatment for cancer these days is to deal you out a small amount of death, via chemo and radiation, in order to deal you back a small amount of life. (There's Irony again, out on the stoop, laughing like hell.)

Freedom's Just Another Word

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Wednesday, 18 June 2014 13:27

Thing is, I automatically turn my thoughts to the parallels between humans and nations, especially as there seem to be so many points of similarities, so many apt metaphors. It's just that our country has so many cancers, and the amounts and kinds of death being dealt out -- the cures -- well, they don't seem to have anything to do with the cancers, with the deeply-rooted problems.

(Here, Irony is silent as a granite tombstone. However, Justice, who happened to be passing by, out collecting favors, caught a piece of this discussion, and is now laughing its ass off, has dropped its blindfold, scales, and sword, and is now on all fours, out on the sidewalk. It's creeping along slowly, shakily, and laughing so hard it can't catch its breath -- just howling, gasping, crying, unable to stand up...)

* * * * *

SitRep: Planet X is in full evidence. There is no sign of my country, not the one I knew, and not the one I'd been told myths about all my life -- the one I'd given up eight years for, while in starched, olive drab pajamas bearing my embroidered name up over one pocket, and my ink-stamped circumstances up over the other, acronymically spelling out: *Uncle Sam Ain't Released Me Yet.*

Memory is still a tricky thing, I find, coming and going as it pleases, like an aimless, restless, fidgety cat padding around in a pneumatic-door test facility, unable to go a step without spooking itself, constantly activating by innocent gesture some accident of electric eyes, optically-triggered games of laser tag, assorted, sordid provocations from motion detectors.

But, you know the adage as well as I do: *Don't get your tail caught, 'cause no one will be there to CYA.* If you missed that one, here's another one: *P*
ut one foot in front of another, and keep going, until it feels natural and automatic, no matter how much it hurts.

There is nothing in the homilies and adages about sliding-door test facilities and berserk motion sensors.

- When both Irony *and* Justice are biting their lips, beads of sweat trickling down their faces, desperately trying to keep mum, you know something major is about to shake loose. No one tells you about those major warning signs of capitalism gone amok.

Freedom's Just Another Word

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Wednesday, 18 June 2014 13:27

All the distilled wisdom and advice humans have passed around for centuries no longer seems adequate to the challenge. This has never seemed more true than when the President's job czar moved a chunk of GE business to China some years ago, helping create six new research centers and train 65 engineers there. Yes, the *same* GE that made five billion dollars in the U.S. that year and paid no taxes. I'm still thinking my way through that one, years later.

Even though I am not laughing out loud, along with Irony, about all this, I do appreciate a sublime turn of phrase from wags who commented at that the time it was clear that Obama had not indicated in which country he wanted those new jobs to be created.

* * * * *

Welcome to the New World, where everything is up for grabs -- everything you knew, or thought you knew, and/or believed in, is either wrong and/or in need of serious revision. It's all up for grabs -- your job, your stability, your ability to stay well-oriented, your sanity, your...

... and that's *before* I bring up the wallet-slapper that a photographer made \$15,000 in one day on Instagram. (And, frankly, not to dance on sour grapes, his stuff's OK, but not technically or artistically impressive, although a few of his shots were, I admit, nice grabs and well done.)

But, you know, if I really wanted to court the elder head-shakers among us, I would here try to bring up the bewildering, queasy sense of what is now considered valuable and worthwhile in this country, and in this era -- what makes money. I would suggest to them wealth is no longer created by making goods out of raw materials -- the old-fashioned pathway to true wealth, as noted by the Founders -- and instead mention that upstart nerdy kid in the hoodie, the 23-year-old who became a billionaire, with that *FacePlace* thing. Or the *Twit* people, or *Twitties*, or whatever they call themselves and their skulking followers -- those whose *stalkings* are anything but festive or Christmassy.

(Such tizzies and rants are free of charge -- no tipping of museum staff is allowed, thank you, though. ☐ Moving along now to the next tirade, we see that...)

Freedom's Just Another Word

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Wednesday, 18 June 2014 13:27

However, I *will* forego all such folksy opportunities, and merely observe that, in my unfocused reading around -- being a *language whore* or a *word slut*, as I would no doubt be called nowadays, with some supposed link to friendly informality and modern displays of quasi-affection -- I will note one bizarre issue: There was one particular traffic tunnel which experienced back-to-back car wrecks blocking travel going both ways, and for endless hours, and for a number of days in a row.

The cause? People under age 30 using small electronic devices while driving -- and then forgetting the *I'm driving* part of the wheeled buffet and banquet, that *driving* was the main event, the entree, and was not the optional appetizer, at their self-hosted multi-ton diner car and movable feast.

- (This is exactly like the self-described multi-taskers who believe they do such a great juggling job, despite tons of research which says they are self-deluded and just plain wrong -- that doing two things at once means that -- at best -- you're doing each thing *half* as well as you could, while believing you're mastering both. Humans have an endless capacity for self-deception. It explains so many inexplicable things, like the Bush years.

All of them.

From
both
of them.)

Although, to be fair -- back to texting and what-not again -- in one case, in another tunnel, across the country, one young man sheepishly said he had been holding his breath while driving and had simply passed out while at the wheel -- which is why he crashed, throwing *chaos supreme* at himself and at strangers already hurtling around him in their own various directions.

Well, I suppose: *Points for honesty, young sir, but penalty box, big time, for incredibly dangerous, boneheaded, air-headed plays.* (Somehow, I think we circled back to *Mind the Gap* territory here, although I am not quite sure how that happened, or which of the many possible gaps we might be talking about.)

Freedom's Just Another Word

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Wednesday, 18 June 2014 13:27

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Did Dubya really say that *the Constitution was just a piece of paper*? Google University says a definitive maybe. Or not. Unless

yes

, absolutely. Some adamantly insist no, some yea -- with both teams packing eyewitness accounts. Police and psychologists and most scientists will tell you, in any given situation with 100 witnesses, you'll get at least 100 different eyewitness accounts, all sworn as accurate and true.

Ah, sweet conundrums, humanity is thy name.

- I'll settle for this: If Dubya didn't actually say it, his administration, and his party, since 1984, have done all they can to imply they think it is 100% true. They also threw in a number of grand freebies, including one where *the Budget, and the Debt Ceiling, is just a piece of paper* -- when it's not booked solid as a Congressional stalling tactic, political poker chip, and hostage ploy, that is.

* * * * *

Between the man in the tunnel who forgot to breathe and Dubya -- *I had to go back to check those were two separate individuals, if you know what I mean*

-- I am reminded of a quote attributed to Albert Einstein:

I fear the day that technology will surpass our human interaction and the world will have a generation of idiots.

You see that quote posted around online quite a lot, usually with images of young people in many social settings and gatherings, where each person is oblivious to the others, and is hunched over a small electronic device. Every member of the group is present in body only, similarly enraptured in solo activity.

That Albert Einstein *likely never said such a thing* does not prevent me from using the quote here, to milk some small amount of reflective amusement and reflexive bemusement for us in these innocent and untethered proceedings.

Freedom's Just Another Word

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Wednesday, 18 June 2014 13:27

- After all, a vast number of groups and organizations never let a little thing like fishy provenance or brimstone-scented balderdash prevent *them* from passing things along in **ALL CAPS**, booming statements down through all the echo-chamber pipelines and spewing ink across wads of talking-points memos.

... not that I'm bringing up Republicans by name for cheap, childish name-calling, mind you. No, if I were going to do that, I would simply say *Rethuglicans*, or *Repugnant-cans*, or *Repukeli cans* and get it out of the way. No, I'm simply saying that our use, here, of a widespread misquote is for our own entertainment, and is far less damaging, or treasonous, or dangerous, or vile, or damnation-worthy, or despairing, or depressing, than many other uses certain groups normally slap into use, and without hesitation, by *opinioneers*, propagandists, darling media dolts and divas, and other such attractive opinion-shaping sludge-farmers and truth-mangling thought bandits disguised as entertainers.

- *You know who they are as well as I do. □ So do they. □ The difference between us and them? □ We tell the truth for free and we do not make three-quarters of a million dollars a week for lying. □ This is where Reality always colors way outside the lines...*

No, any deep misunderstanding of what Einstein actually said, or did not say, along with any twisting of any meanings, is done here for wholesome entertainment purposes only, and is wholly unlike the demented, mean-spirited, twisted reasoning and false understanding of, say, the Founders, by, say, any other group of people who would, for example, wave around yellow snake flags pleading for no foot trampling, and who staple small mesh containers of dried plant leaves onto the folded, raised brims of 3-cornered hats last worn around 214 years ago -- back when such things were not attempted because IQs were considerably higher than today. Plus, there were lots more chores to do.

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Freedom's Just Another Word

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By the way, I picked age 30, way back there, for the generic, drivers-and-device-users, on purpose. I remember reading one time that 30 was once considered the age when adulthood was considered finally achieved in some cultures. This makes a great deal of sense, just from a physical, mental, and emotional point of view regarding human development. And from looking around at others. And trends. And remembering that time when I... *Yes, well.*

- Rather than make cheap shots at this point regarding popular culture, I will simply add that you couldn't prove anything by me along those lines, that adulthood could or would be delayed until age 30, even though I have much empathy for the point. See, by age 18, I was handling M-16 automatic rifles, M-18 Claymore mines, M-60 machine guns, M-67 fragmentation grenades, and being parked in a tear-gas test chamber, eyes ablaze, tears streaming down my face, my nose threatening to match the output of Hoover Dam, on the brink of learning to trust the rubbery armadillo of a military gas mask.

Trust comes harder at some ages than it does others. This is probably true of historical ages as well as the ages of any one human. No wonder these eras taken forever to complete, move on, and get the next one rolling.

* * * * *

I am trusting in historical cycles to correct the slippery psychosis of the extreme right wing of America before the country falls completely and utterly to fascism.

- (And no, you may NOT sniggeringly invoke Gothcha! Godwin! on my ass at this point, because it is absolutely possible to be a fascist without being a Nazi. Ask the financiers and fascists who tried a forcible coup of this country in 1933. Ask the people described in the document, Fourteen Defining Characteristics of Fascism. Check history. And so on.)

Eventually, long after all traces of my body and my thoughts are gone, reason might again be restored, just as rain eventually follows heat, just as rain eventually follows drought, just as rain eventually follows desiccation as destructive as the Dust Bowl of the 1930s -- where storms from the Great Plains blew layers and layers of topsoil -- millions and millions of pounds at a

Freedom's Just Another Word

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Wednesday, 18 June 2014 13:27

time -- for days at a time, year after year, pushing punishing, raging clouds from the heart of the nation across the country and, finally, into the sea.

Such storms and catastrophes are difficult for modern Americans to imagine. It must have been something like being in the wartime Blitz of London and having bombs rain down on you at random, never knowing when destruction would knock on the rooftop, not the front door, before helping itself, bursting in. Many storms ravaged through the plains states, howling from the Canadian border south to Texas. One time, red snow fell in New England, trying hard to shed blown and bled soil.

* * * * *

When you tell made-up stories, you start out by saying *Once upon a time...* However, it seems to me, when telling the truth, you should start off with something else, like, *Many Earth birthdays ago...*, or even, *Many annual laps-around-the-sun back from here...* or something like that. But, you know, there seems to be no really good way to improve on that, on saying *Once upon a time.*

We could use a way to improve on that, to help tell the difference between fancy, fantasy, and fact, when telling stories. We could use a way to help tell the difference between fancy, fantasy, and factualness all across this country.

- Someday, historical cycles will help drive out the appalling psychoses of what Republicanism has become since Eisenhower, and what Tea Baggery always was from the start. Meanwhile, we're enduring trials as mean as the years of the Dust Bowl, as dangerous and miserable as any attempted coup, and as comforting as the deafening silence of hundreds of unanswered resumes. Just in different ways. Different, but just as devastating.

Yes, for the meantime, here we all are, with various attempted coups attacking our minds and reason, various dust storms blasting and broadcasting through our hearts and spirits, with our battered and beat-up bodies all locked up, and cemented into, little cinder-block blockhouses, being taught all about tear gas -- and us, trying to learn, without a gas mask in sight.

Freedom's Just Another Word

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Wednesday, 18 June 2014 13:27

Epilogue: □ The Song and Dance Continues

A long time ago, when thunder lizards roamed the Earth as kings, and when the world started revealing itself to me with typical, crystal teenage clarity, one song was pretty popular. One of the lyrics, I remember, was *Freedom's just another word for nothing left to lose*.

That concept was going to have to wait, because Americans would have to get a bellyful of bat-crap crazy, before anything will change, before half the country will realize they've been lied to, used, abused, and put up soaking wet and ripped off. Before anyone understands there's *already* nothing left to lose...

Before people kick over any imaginary statues of the Four Horsewomen of the Apocalyptic American Mental Meltdown -- Sarah Palin, Michele Bachmann, Ayn Rand, and Ann Coulter. Before people realize that riding shotgun with them is Rick Perry, Mitch McConnell, and the ghosts of Eric Cantor, Paul Ryan, and a hundred other shifty-eyed lunatics.

Before people break free and stop drinking the sleazy grease of vulture capitalism, where destruction, not construction, triggers profit and glee. Before people realize there is such a thing as choice and action -- provided both are linked with information and involvement.

- Hey: The Founders charged us with keeping alive a free press, so information could get to the people. *That one* was shot down the instant Fox brought suit and it was OK to lie in the news and everyone started providing opinion-based "news," or worse: *news-as-infotainment-meets-propaganda-meets-agenda-implementation*.

- The only other thing the Founders charged us with doing, besides being being *informed*, was being *involved* in our government.

That one was shot down the instant we handed the keys to the country to a bunch of knot-heads and bloodsuckers and told them to *handle it, handle it*

-- while we tuned out, trimmed our toenails, took to our teevees, touched up our tans.

Freedom's Just Another Word

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Wednesday, 18 June 2014 13:27

But, hey -- who can blame people for inaction? The poor are scrambling to simply survive, and the middle class, once browbeaten into submission by the fear they'd be shoved in with the poor, are, this minute, sliding right in with the poor. *Yes: Irony is a cruel mistress.*

But, you know, it's probably fine with everyone that most people have to work for a month to gain what the average CEO takes home in an hour. Income equality? Wage gap? Corporate welfare? Offshore trillions of the rich, in tax havens, along with corporate profits, hiding out from a fair cut back to the very same country that allowed them the ability, and provided the foundation, for them to gather such wealth?

You know, the revolution won't start when the *gummint* comes for anyone's guns -- the revolution will start when the *gummint* takes away your big screen teevee and the basic, cheap-ass six-pack costs as much as a pickup truck. Then, *maybe* then...

You know, if I didn't know better, I'd *swear* the current version of that same lyric in that popular song, back when -- the version I keep hearing being sung these days? -- is *Freedom's just another word for doin' what I wanna do.*

And, you know what? Turns out, I *don't* know any better. Just have a look. All sorts of out-of-control charlatans, flimflammers, and outright thieves, running around, talking about *freedom* this, and *freedom* that -- putting *freedom* in the names of their plotting, plodding right-wing think tanks...

Freedom's Just Another Word

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Wednesday, 18 June 2014 13:27

Putting *freedom* in the names of fascist wanna-be political action groups. Putting *freedom* in the name and philosophy of make-believe, toy astroturf groups funded by billionaires to dupe the masses into doing their work for them. Sliding

freedom

into the names of corporations that pollute the land and gut the country and its people...

Hell, on to even stabbing in the back a good friend to this country, and the giver of our symbol of liberty -- our so-called leaders making their belligerent, belittling, snotty little points by putting *freedom*

in the names of some foods in Congressional cafeterias....

freedom□

fries

, *freedom*

toast

, *freedom*□

onion soup

...

- So much for *Me and Bobby McGee*. Yeah, sing it with me, everyone: *Freedom's just another word for doin' what*

I

wanna do... Nothin' don't mean nothin', hon, if it ain't all about

ME

-- *yes, yes...*

Talk about *Mindin' the Gap...*

Which Gaps you want to talk about... or *put off* talking about? I got plenty of time, here in the lagoon. They won't drain the swamp, so they say, as long as they make those red coffee stirrers. If you have to be here, drop on by -- but bring your own little red snorkel.

Info:

Luntzification of language: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Frank_Luntz

Freedom's Just Another Word

Written by Alex Baer

Wednesday, 18 June 2014 13:27

Unemployed teams:

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/fact-checker/wp/2014/01/30/are-there-91-million-americans-on-the-sidelines-looking-for-work/>

GE, Immelt, China - old (yawn) news: <http://www.snopes.com/politics/business/ge.asp>

Instagram photog:

<http://www.news.com.au/technology/gadgets/how-a-photographer-made-over-15000-on-instagram-in-one-day/story-fnjwul0i-1226850348006>

Breathe deeply: <http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2014/05/26/holding-breath-oregon-crash/9602071/>

Einstein, technology, and humans: <http://quoteinvestigator.com/2013/03/19/tech-surpass/>

Quick historical recap of a coup attempt, having nothing to do with Christ:

<http://www.liberallikechrist.org/about/FDRcoup.html>

Longer recap: <http://www.counterpunch.org/2008/10/03/fdr-s-response-to-the-plot-to-overthrow-him/>

14 terrifying signs: <http://www.rense.com/general37/char.htm>

Dust Bowl: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dust_Bowl

Freedom food: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Freedom_fries

Freedom's Just Another Word

Written by Alex Baer
Wednesday, 18 June 2014 13:27

Bonus Healing Music:

Me and Bobby McGee: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OTHRg_iSWzM

Another Brick in the Wall: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-7rIVPCmKzY>

And now... from Australian radio -- The Bombay Royale! <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VkQewE-tFuA&feature>

... and Babylon Circus! <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=325hz4Q1WNU>