

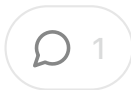
# Weeded Out

From the Garden of Eden



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Affordability.

How is that defined?

Where do you draw the line of what is deemed affordable, or out-of-reach?

The average salary in the United States is somewhere around sixty-seven thousand dollars. One could make the argument that it is impossible to survive on that amount of money.

I could argue that a family of four is barely getting by on four hundred thousand dollars a year before taxes. In fact, I believe I did approximately two weeks ago in a different column.

In this present round of inflation something has changed. As if an invisible hand is guiding costs, that these costs we are experiencing have been disconnected from actual inflationary processes and supply and demand, but manipulated for a purpose.

As if there is a desired separation taking place. A wheat from the chafe moment.

As if there is a test taking place, where you either separate your family from the masses and join those at the top, or you fall woefully behind to an inadequate level that puts you at the bottom of society.

The idea for this particular column came from the advent of the World Cup coming once again to America. The World's game being celebrated here, in a nation that used to ignore the spectacle, but that is now embracing a sport that has not been on the stage here in America.

I believe the last time the World Cup came to America was 1994, and I took my family to a game in New Jersey. The family made a weekend out of the event, we booked ourselves into the Sheraton mid-town New York City, and made a family vacation revolve around the game.

I can't recall what it all cost, only that we were a young, struggling, family of that time, and we didn't balk at the ticket prices, or hotel costs, even in pricey midtown Manhattan. As I recall I considered the entire weekend "affordable".

I just logged onto a site to check out 2026 World Cup prices and the low range is nine hundred per ticket. As you get to the finals, and the more important games, the prices go toward two-thousand dollars a ticket. Per ticket. Each.

Sorry, but at my advanced age, and detachment from normal life, I can't tell anyone whether that is considered expensive and unaffordable or not.

Personally I think that those prices are completely and utterly ridiculous.

But what of the "football" aficionado, the true fan, the die-hard who has lived their entire lives over the team that represents their nation, what if he has planned this bucket list trip to the World Cup for years, and years, does he consider such a mere investment in being there for the once in a lifetime event? Does he see the costs as reasonable to cheer on his national team in the actual World Cup? Is he "happy" to pay these prices to see his nation compete?

Am I the middle class dolt, raised in the lower middle class, and barely cresting

upper middle class at this point in time, who doesn't realize what it costs to just live a normal life in America anymore?

Our youngest just spent a long Holiday weekend at the new Four Seasons in Naples, a brand new establishment that is being hailed as a great new addition to Florida resorts. She detailed costs to us, the twelve hundred dollar room, the six hundred dollar per day pool cabana, the average three hundred and more per couple and dinner costs. Room service coffee, and danish at well over a fifty dollar bill. More coffee. With rolls. Near seventy dollars in total, after added gratuity.

A four day weekend if "done right" is going to run eight to ten grand per couple.

Sorry, but I can no longer be sure if that is a bargain, or the new normal. I don't know whether an escape from the ratchet "Carnival Cruise Line" crowd requires such an investment these days, or if that is over-the-top.

We've reached a new level of cost to avoid the masses.

A stay at the Breakers, or Boca Club, or even the Greenbriar or Nemaquin has thousands per night. Standard. Is that just the cost today to vacation in style, or is it to avoid having to sit poolside listening to a neighbor's boom box, or are these the higher end of the scale?

Taking your son-in-law and grandchild to a World Cup game requires a five grand investment this Summer. Is that just the normal and expected "cost to play", or is it now an established system that is rigging the costs, rigging the game?

Are we all now living in a Ticketmaster World, where one firm controls the venues, the tickets, the concessions, and we are all being raped by design? Are we being forced to participate in a closed competition system, where monopolistic practices dictate pricing?

I am starting to believe that at every turn there is such a sinister hand at play, prices are manipulated, where they are kept artificially high, and you either pay or aren't welcomed. You either participate and go along with it all as if practical and reasonable, or you are a cretin that doesn't belong.

We all now live in a Birken handbag world, you either can afford one and participate or you need to leave the premises. The only way in for you is through the catering service in a uniform. You can stay, but you'll have to carry a tray, smile, and hand out petit fours to the real people.

We are being weeded out by the scream. If you scream out any objection to this pricing, no soup for you, you don't belong, please find the nearest available exit.

If you don't flinch at being financially raped, well, you qualify, hand us your credit card to charge as we wish, and smile as you pay the bill. Pay no attention to the label of "added charges".

This "hidden hand" I feel is akin to our newfound "tipping society", where the cashier at the bakery counter turns the screen and you find three options, 18%, 22%, and a "no tip" button to add a "tip". Not to the waitress. Not to the person who baked the pastries. Not to this apron clad woman who pressed the buttons for your order in less than ten seconds, and who will hand you the bag of goods for your departure.

As if she "earned" eight dollars in that thirty seconds, playing "Vanna White" while spinning the screen your way, glaring you down, daring you to press the small "No Tip" button at the bottom.

You venture out, order drinks, they present the bill and you see the Sancerre wine at twenty-six dollars a glass. The beer over ten dollars. Social pressure dictates you don't flinch, lest you expose yourself as being too poor to even take up room at their

To complain is to expose yourself for being unable to afford to live comfortably as one who doesn't belong.

As if the concierge is going to turn to you and say, there is a nice Holiday Inn a few miles away, perhaps you'd like to call them for rates and availability, well, Four Seasons here.

It doesn't seem as if it was all that long ago that life was much more "affordable."

I recall ordering that fifty year old tawny port with the cappuccino and dessert, the cost wasn't out-of-reach.

Tell the truth, can you go out to dinner at a fine establishment these days and ignore the right side of the menu? Order the Wagyu or Tomahawk, or Kobe with no concern?

I am starting to believe that the wealthy have decided to truly separate themselves from the masses and are using prices to do so. A neighbor at dinner the other day remarked that he no longer goes to Palm Beach proper to dine, they've raised prices to the extent he just doesn't feel any value in driving there to dine. And me, this couple could dine out in Palm Beach every night of the week and never touch the right side of any menu. They lack for nothing. But they are reasonable people, they don't wish to be *gouged*. Is it no longer reasonable to want to be treated "fairly?"

I ask, have the establishments in Palm Beach decided to raise pricing to weed out but the very wealthy? Is this intentional, have they disconnected price from actual cost, so that only their "acceptable" crowd attends? Using price to ensure a self-selection, of those that have and have no worries, and those that swallow hard their costs?

I feel as if we are living in exactly that world right now, where some unseen hand

disconnected price from the actual standard mark-ups, the actual costs. They are market pricing products toward a preferred clientele.

Pricing as a weapon, to ensure only the desired and prosperous customer can take advantage of the services being rendered. All others need not apply.

Certainly the consideration of purchasing World Cup tickets has that feel. If you are at those costs, then that world isn't for you.

Now I realize some of the establishments I have mentioned are at the highest end. Four Seasons is beyond compare to the random Marriott, which is of course a better choice than the Hampton Inn. Each have their place.

But the cost at the high end is beginning to outpace even this ridiculous level of inflation. As if designed to weed out the masses. And ensure only the wealthy can attend.

Invisible "hedge rows" surrounding the finer establishments all around us all, back to the movie quote I referenced the other day.

We have a pool. A pool and a pond. The pond would be good *for you*.

We are now living in a world where the hidden hand has condemned us all to live as the few enjoy poolside, in a cabana, with "misters", butler service, and a best experience. They do not even wish for the masses to see behind the hedgerows; they don't want the prying eyes.

I ask you dear reader, does it feel in your present circumstances as if a switch has been flipped, with prices increased beyond any normal inflationary circumstances, and being artificially held at levels designed to break and split our society, so that the cream rises to the top, while all else falls inward, as if some failed soufflé?

Have you ventured out recently and silently scoffed at the costs? Or did you smile, not wishing to reveal your own pedigree?

“Wincing” is the new test, developing a facial tick when presented the bill, please do not attempt to reserve a table in the future.

Or am I the lame idiot, complaining about the quality of the massage, the cleanliness of the spa, the lack of amenities, complaining that upon stepping forth from the spa there was no iced towel proffered?

Are we all now living in a world of delineations of comfort that only go from very comfortable, to extremely comfortable, where the threshold for pain is at yesterday's minimum anticipated requirement?

Can you imagine our present day lifestyle plunged into a very real depression? A lifestyle collapse?

The top 10 percent simply could not cope. A self-manicure, are you daft?

Eight dollar gasoline in California feels as if by design, not market driven.

Am I wrong, or am I on to something?

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Wages are not keeping up with inflation. Capital is taxed at half the rate of labor. The tax is responsible for what? 75% of consumer spending? The divide is growing and is due to government policies. I lived in the "poor" part of Beverly Hills, went to HS there. I did not see an Iranian kid driving a Lamborghini to school there back in the 1980s, post-Shah. I think that expensive things are wonderful. But so are well maintained public places. Upward mobility is being strangled. Both parties are bought. Thomas Massie and a rare few others actually represent the people. The rest in positions of power are bought. Psychological operations are quite effective in limiting our options to organize. Thank you for your insights.



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