

*Then and Now and What's Ahead*

*An “Un-Common” Interview  
With Sortitionist David Grant*

by  
A Younger Man

December 2030

*Now that the Citizen Chamber has completed the second year of its allotted trial period of twelve, one of the initial instigators of the sortitional method – what we once called ‘random selection’ – has agreed to a series of short interviews to reflect upon how we got here and where we might be going. We met for the first time mid-afternoon at a quiet bistro.*

*Mr. Grant has asked we begin the interview with a cup of tea and no talk. For one as dedicated to the expansive as he has been – having propelled, two decades ago, the popular drive to institute the sortitional procedures that have led to today’s nascent Government By The People – this leisured grace is apropos.*

*Fifteen minutes later, tea cups down to the dregs, he looks up, smiles in a way I’m not sure is for me or at me, and says “We stop the war. Let us begin.”*

*A Younger Man (AYM): When did you first learn that random selection – sortition – could be used to choose a legislature?*

David Grant (DG): The first I remember was in an article<sup>1</sup> I read ... about fifty years ago. The idea stuck in my head like a hard-shelled kernel. It took its time to emerge but when it did it was a sturdy shoot.

You need to remember that many in my generation felt assaulted by the government. It was a force that could send a young man to fight and die on the other side of the world for spurious reasons. The slogan that resonated was “Question authority”. We were young and uncertain if, and how much, we could trust our neighbors. This situation created cognitive dissonance for us since we’d been given the line in civics classes that the government was supposed to be ‘the people’. The government was not supposed to a separate entity.

In any case, it took another five years before I arranged the time to write the first draft of my novel with sortition as the storyline’s motor. It got the attention of one publisher. The first 30 pages or so grabbed them. They sent me all their promotional material. But that’s as far as it went.

Another decade went by before I wrote the screenplay. It took another twenty years until it was produced. That was, as you know, the crucial piece, the one that really put the matter on the national stage. But before Tom Timmins [the network mogul] put his money behind it, I was making presentations to groups of less than a dozen.

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<sup>1</sup> Phillips, Michael. “New Age Doctrine is Out to Lunch on Three Issues”. *CoEvolution Quarterly*, (Summer, 1980). Print.

I'm glad, though, that I made the one-man-band versions, one a half-hour and the other ninety minutes. Not many people know about those but they drew enough attention at the time to keep me going. The originals are now in the National Archives.

AYM: *What drew you to the idea?*

DG: Frustration drew me to it. A suspicion that all the brouhaha about voting was somehow a red herring. I say that, even now, with trepidation. My father was one of the many who dedicated his life to extending the balloting franchise. They won that battle, sometimes at fatal cost. So for me to not value those sacrifices ... seemingly not to value them ... that is still criticized as having betrayed a vision.

I'll also admit to selfishness as a draw to the idea. Selfishness and laziness. Fortunately from those two negatives derives a positive: efficiency. Let me explain.

On the one hand, I ... speaking personally ... I could look back to my childhood and teenage years and see that I had to strive, beyond the norm, for acceptance. As a black boy in a white and often privileged environment... Excuse my use of those crude terms but 'black' and 'white' was the way society delineated us back then... In any case... I 'got over' as it was said. I was accepted. Mostly. Mostly got over. Mostly got

<b>Timeline: Establishment of the Citizen Chamber</b>	
1980	Article suggesting sortition by Michael Phillips, <i>CoEvolution Quarterly</i>
1985	<i>A Citizen Legislature</i> , book-length essay, Callenbach & Phillips
1985	<i>The Common Lot</i> , novel, David Grant (unpublished)
1997	<i>The Common Lot: Next Step for Democracy</i> , screenplay, David Grant (produced 2018)
2005-2010	Low budget video essay and docu-drama, <i>The Common Lot</i> , 30- and 90-minute versions, David Grant (webcast)
2011	'Sortition' enters the mainstream lexicon via articles and presentations by academics and activists <sup>2</sup>
2016	Election of the first Representative pledged to legislating a sortitionally-chosen Citizen Chamber
2017	Editorial cartoon and syndicated strip lead to widespread understanding and demand for a Government By The People
2018	Popular feature film: <i>The Common Lot: Next Step for Democracy</i>
2020-2025	Comedic interactive television series: "Our Common Lot: <i>We The People!</i> "
2022	Several states use sortition to select their legislatures; challenged in courts.
2023	Supreme Court rules use of sortition is a legislative matter, not a constitutional one.
2024	Election of a majority of Congress pledged to legislate a sortitionally-chosen Citizen Chamber
2028	Citizen Chamber of sortitionally-chosen representatives replaces the U.S. House of Representatives for a twelve year trial period

<sup>2</sup> "The Kleroterians" established a blog called "Equality by Lot" <http://equalitybylot.wordpress.com/> They took the name from the device used by the ancient Athenian democracy to randomly choose citizens for government service.

past the elementary school fistfights aimed at me, a First-and-Only. Sometimes had to clown my way through. Thankful for that. Nothing wrong with knowing how to make people laugh; even at one's own expense. If there was malice from some, that was their fault and their loss. The self-confidence instilled by my parents made it easy to shrug it off.

But if it came to the popularity contests that all elections are, I could see the costs would be greater than I wanted to pay. It wasn't just that anyone who wanted to obtain elected office had to construct a fashionable persona no matter how false – and in the world of grown-up politics that meant groveling for money -- it was also that elections required a competitive aggressiveness that I -- and most people -- do not have.

So ... call it sour grapes or call it enlightened self-interest. Aesop's fable does not confirm or refute the ripeness of those hanging grapes on the vine. For my father's generation, the suffering required to obtain the grapes of theretofore inaccessible color-blind suffrage insured those grapes, once tasted, would be perceived as sweet. But just as for everyone else who partook of those grapes without the sacrifice, it wasn't long before it became apparent that they were indeed sour. My decision therefore to eschew reaching for the grapes of electoral candidacy was a selfish, even if enlightened, one.

When I say I was also drawn to the idea because of laziness, that is because elections were such a damn bother, all that hullabaloo, the rah-rah and sis-boom-bah. Not that I wasn't good at it. In fact ... because I was good at it. One of my sharpest memories from high school was when I was chosen, alone, as a freshman, to lead the whole school in cheers at a football rally. I had those eight hundred boys in the palm of my hand, gripped by my wild enthusiasm and mesmerized by my rhetorical excesses. I was Hitler. It was scary.

I turned away from it. But it didn't turn away from me.

A few years later I found myself on the front page *New York Times* Sunday magazine. That one, you are familiar with since detractors pilloried me with it during the debates. I have no regrets.

But that episode again turned me away from the path of fame. I didn't like walking down the street, recognized by all and sundry. No surprise. Most people prefer their privacy. So ... lazy in that way.

But willing to do my part, if asked. The problem was, of course: How was anyone to ask if the only way to be one of 'the people' of which government was to be 'by' ... was to go through the electoral contest that required more than the vast majority were willing to endure.

And what a loss that was...

Well... these arguments have long been hashed out.

*AYM: Why did it take so long for you to take it on?*

DG: I had to make a living. Also, remember that I did make several false starts. First, two versions of a novel. Then a screenplay. Then a video essay. None of them succeeded.

I kept at it, on the side of other things -- good things, I need add; I had several items on my life's list that I wanted to accomplish. So life just sort of delayed things until the happy accident of a propitious time ... when the breakthrough came.

*AYM: I have read that the most substantial resistance came from the concern about loss of control and accountability. The ballot was understood as the sacrosanct main pillar, the defining aspect, of democracy. With sortition there was no way to 'throw the bums out'. That must have been the first challenge, correct?*

DG: It was a major challenge, yes. Underlying the political aspect was a philosophical question about the reign of individual agency. It was too arcane for much public articulation but the loss of the choice to run for office -- in 'the land of the free' -- threatened, not just American, but the Western world's, allegiance to individualism. I was glad, frankly, that the resistance didn't focus on that, but rather on the political.

We responded to that aspect with three points. First, all the previous mechanisms of recall still applied. Second, the structural checks of judicial restraint remained in place. Third, and most dramatically, we convinced doubters that the Ethics Committee would be stronger than ever, given that the percentage of legislators accused then of ethical breaches was several times higher than the generally more honest citizenry.<sup>3</sup>

Frankly, with that third point we played it both ways by also acknowledging that there were plenty of good-willing, hard-working politicians, not 'bums', who -- though no longer able to win office through competitive campaigning -- could nonetheless expend their considerable energies to improve the public welfare by serving as staffers to the Citizen Chamber or in the civil service or in any of the myriad private organizations working for the public good.

But that wasn't really the first challenge.

*AYM: Was the first challenge, then, the association of sortition with gambling?*

DG: No, we dispatched that concern -- which came largely from people identifying themselves as 'religious' -- with the fact that religious texts are replete with support for sortition, often using it to request divine intervention.

No, that wasn't the first substantial challenge.

The first challenge was 'normalcy'.

People do not like radical change. That's why I settled on calling myself a lobbyist ... a lobbyist for 'a government by the people'. Even though I personally preferred the term 'sortitional selection' -- and I did promote that at every opportunity, finally prevailing -- nonetheless, back then, what got attention at the beginning was the point that sortition could be the mechanism to institute 'by the people'.

So, trying not to stretch the confines of normalcy too much, I downplayed the fact -- a fact in plain view -- that sortition would be revolutionary. It was a constant source of amusement to notice how, upon first being presented with the idea, people would exclaim what a revolution sortition would be. But they would often just as quickly drop that consideration. The revolutionary aspect became, conveniently, an elephant in the room -- one that eventually was tamed and harnessed as 'democratic evolution' through sortition.

*We took another break at this point. Mr. Grant said he found it tiresome to spend much time thinking about his past accomplishments. Besides, he said, it was a beautiful sunset that shouldn't be wasted.*

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<sup>3</sup> "Crews Most Corrupt", Citizens for Responsibility & Ethics In Washington, <http://www.crewsmostcorrupt.org/>. Web.

*Next morning we met at a local cafe.*

*AYM: What was the most difficult personal challenge?*

DG: Being perceived as a prude.

That was a charge that was slow to develop but I had known it would eventually.

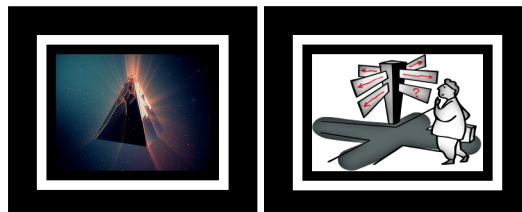
As a young man in the socially conservative mid-century I reveled with my peers in swinging the pendulum in the other direction. That led to overreach in the other direction – sex, drugs and rock'n'roll. Fueled by a youthful demographic, nothing was new about that exuberance. What is surprising, particularly in hindsight, is that the more historically significant counter-swing was not the loud reaction to a decline in social mores but rather the political swing towards acceptance of imperial design. Not that the nation hadn't long been on that track – from the Monroe Doctrine through the colonization of the Philippines to the Cold War's hegemonic aftermath. The folly of turn-of-the-century overreach resulted in a 'superpower' that was super in only two areas: military force and hubris.

So when some of us argued the unseemliness required to put oneself forward in the overweening manner required of electoral candidacy I wasn't surprised when we were accused of harking back to the late 19th century's standard of decorous self-abnegation.

On the other hand, that underlying sense of humility did resonate beyond the traditionalist core. Even the progressive movements that have swept this country from the time of independence ... through emancipation ... the labor movement, women's suffrage and all the rest ... they've all had support from what we still call 'traditional values'.

So what started out as possibly the most difficult and even dangerous challenge -- dangerous insofar as some fear mongers raised a worst case of irreconcilable civil strife -- turned out to be a strong point of sortition. It spoke to fairness and it spoke to limits. It didn't claim to make us any more, or any less, than who we already were.

Once recognized as a support rather than a hindrance, that 'most difficult challenge' – traditional values -- suddenly illuminated everyone. In fact, now that I mention it, I wonder if anyone has looked into sunspot activity at that time? We all remember that moment. The cartoonist Edwards captured it<sup>4</sup>.



From then on I knew we had reached the fourth stage of Gandhi's famous dictum: "First they ignore you; then they laugh at you; then they fight you; and then you win."

*AYM: But you used the electoral system to legislate sortition. After what you've just said, wasn't that hypocritical?*

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<sup>4</sup> Edwards, Linda. Cartoon. *New Yorker* 23 Dec 2017: 119. Subsequent syndication. Print. / Image on left © Changethought 2008. All rights reserved.

DG: Not hypocritical. Pragmatic. And, granted, ironic.

It was odd, yes, to ask so many who abjured electioneering to stand and run on a platform that they would vote to eliminate themselves with a sortitional system. But once the Supreme Court cleared the way, ruling that sortition was not a constitutional issue but only a legislative one<sup>5</sup>, we had no choice.

You should remember, besides, that we never claimed to be getting rid of majority voting itself. The representatives of the Citizen Chamber certainly aren't expected to live and love by consensus. It's just that we wanted the players on the field to be negotiating decisions that would then truly be 'by the people'.

*AYM: Were you ever concerned that moment would not come?*

DG: No. I was never concerned that it would not eventually happen.

When reason inhabits intuition, inevitability results.

From the first moment I learned of sortition, it was a no-brainer ... just as deterministic as can be. For me that was a detriment. I grew up in the middle of North America, imbued – or maybe 'infected' – with admiration for a pioneering spirit. If something is inevitable, I've often felt, there really isn't anything to pioneer.

I remember the first time I publicly presented the idea of 'government by the people'. It was at an event about using public media. The agenda was such that anyone could, on the spot, name and facilitate a group discussion. Four people of the 200 participants came to my little session.

The main concern of those four was that uninformed opinions of the man-on-the-street – whether through the internet or through face-to-face town hall meetings – would lead to ill-advised legislation. That was a serious worry at the time, the concern about rule by plebiscite. We pointed to the many examples of randomly-chosen citizen advisory boards that were given the time and resources to deliberate and which had come up with solutions more creative and equitable than what the elected politicians had. We pointed out that a Citizen Legislature would have more time ... twice as much as elected representatives, in fact, since a sortitional representative would not be spending half of the time campaigning and raising money. We had also agreed there would be a three month training period as well as the resources of a professional staff.

The concerns evaporated and the four concluded that sortition 'made consummate sense' ... but just as surely 'would never happen'. Because of my inclination to lose interest in anything inevitable, I can thank that little group for stimulating me to prove my reply: "I don't believe in 'never'."

*AYM: Earlier you disparaged the overconfidence that our culture is prone to. I'm wondering about your own self-confidence back then. When you made the decision to become a 'lobbyist for a government by the people' you were out of a job, with modest savings, in an economically uncertain time, and at retirement age to boot. What gave you such self-confidence to pursue the quixotic? And, in that vein, why did you start out as a commercial outfit, not a non-profit as every other person would have done?*

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<sup>5</sup> Walls v. Oregon et al. 98 L. Ed. 873-884. Supreme Court of the United States. 2023. Print.

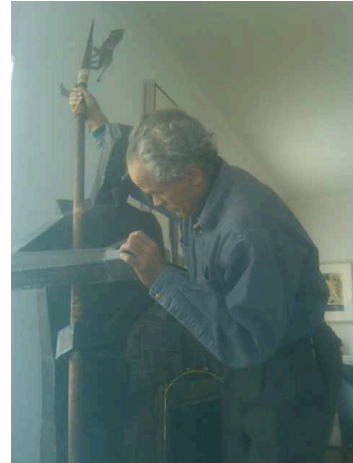
DG: I kept getting indicators that I was on the right path. The more I trusted in myself the more strongly those indicators arose. You're right, though, to use the word 'quixotic'. Even though I didn't think I was as hopelessly deluded by my vision as Quixote was by his, I did feel an affinity. But, as said, I did get indicators of support, sometimes quite surprising.

I remember sitting in a cafe like this one, near the beginning ... within a month or two ... in fact it was just before Thanksgiving. I was typing up an article to put on The Common Lot webpage. You have to remember that I had spent the previous decade working largely alone. So just to get a feel of 'the public' I would sometimes go to work in public places.

Anyway, when I was sitting there in the cafe, with my cup – it was coffee then -- establishing myself as a legitimate paying customer, a young woman on the other side of the room got up from next to her boyfriend or husband, came over and sat down next to me to say "We've been looking at you for the last half hour. You are a beautiful man exuding health and happiness. We just wanted to tell you that". I blushed, thanked her and told her man he was a lucky guy to have such a partner.

Later on I shivered in gratitude and attributed the incident -- no matter how absurdly it indicates my own overconfidence -- to the fact that the vision streaming through me was becoming apparent to others.

Eventually I made a business plan, with budget, brochure, prospectus and all the rest of it. I got the contracts I was looking for. But, truth is, I always knew ... It would only be a matter of time.



Grant with a statue of Don Quixote (photo: Michaela Perrone)

*AYM: You consider yourself a lucky man, don't you?*

DG: Yes. What is it about grace? Grace comes undeserved. Or would one refer to it as karma? Is it then only a matter of birth?

I've tried not to be greedy, have tried to give more than I've been given. I haven't always succeeded. Once I excused myself for some questionable behavior as being 'just a man', no better or worse than any other. The family I grew up in was a proud one. They had risen from the manacles of Mississippi and the tenancy of Tennessee. They'd overcome stigmas of color and class. Sometimes they bent the law and sometimes the law bent them. By the time I arrived they were ahead of the pack.

Someone said, "'Luck' is earned." Accomplishments may be earned. But the context that allows 'success' comes as a given, as a 'just is'.

*AYM: What about the economics part? Your decision to start out as a profit-making venture. You were roundly criticized for that.*

DG: Yes, there was suspicion among the politically liberal of anyone working 'for profit'. Up until then I'd worked almost exclusively in non-profits. I had myself rejected the taint of self-aggrandizement that attached to 'capitalist roaders'. Ha! There's an expression from the past.

I didn't have a clue what small business was about. I think I wrote something like 'the marketplace of ideas will provide'. What an idealist ... being kind in my judgment of myself. Everyone else was, at least, kind enough to refrain from using, to my face, the word 'naive'.

All I knew was that lobbyists were reputed to make a good living. And that small business was said to be the main driver of innovation. And, finally, that the good part of capitalism was that it fostered creative risk-taking. The only price was the cost of failure. Maybe I'd be on the street like the guy I would jog by, living under a bridge. I'd had a friend once who had lived with her young daughter under a bridge for a while. I didn't want to do that but I knew of saints, gurus, crazy wise ones who had ... as I myself as a young man had, vision-questing into darkness and danger. The worst case I envisioned would be to be an old man alone with a hot plate. I didn't want that either but I was willing to take that chance and accept that end if it came to it.

The commercial thing worked out. I found partners who were taken by the adventure, willing to search for what 'the next step for democracy' might be. They contracted productions and presentations. I took the cue from George Bernard Shaw: "If you propose to tell the truth, you had better make it funny -- or they will stone you to death." The comedic provocations from Common Lot Productions have more than paid for themselves. Which is why we are sitting here.

I'm happy and satisfied that my for-profit outfit has created a venue for so many to make a living out of establishing the inevitable, a government by the people.

*With a shrug, he indicated it was enough for the day. He took his leave saying again how he really doesn't like to look back much.*

*Next day our meeting was at another cafe.*

*AYM: What about today? What are the challenges now?*

DG: Well, we're only part of the way there. We've replaced the House of Representatives with the sortitional, nearly proportionally representative Citizen Chamber. It's too bad we could not have replaced the Senate instead. But that would have required a constitutional change, not only a legislative one. It's change enough to have instituted sortition.

In any case, I expect that as the Citizens Chamber demonstrates itself to be the only fully legitimate expression of a government by the people, that archaic remnant of the propertied House of Lords, the Senate, will be eliminated. Not much longer will Senators -- representing less than 15% of the population, 41 of the 100 -- be able to block all legislation. The Citizen Chamber has already shown itself to be not only as competent and trustworthy as the Senate, but also more creative, more lively and, as said, more legitimate.

I doubt it will be more than another decade before we establish a unicameral Citizen Legislature. Then we will have, finally and for the first time in history, a government by the people. When that happens, this nation will have shaken off the decline it had fallen to as a 'museum of democracy' and will have recovered its role as the world's 'laboratory of democracy'.

*AYM: What about the political parties? They have resisted from the beginning.*



DG: Yes, sure they did. They have lost a lot of power. First they tried ignoring the movement. Then they tried laughing it out of existence as 'a crap shoot'.

Then they appealed to geographical self-interest, howling that citizens would be losing their federal advocates for local issues.

*AYM: That is still an issue, isn't it?*

DG: It is and it isn't. The Citizen Chamber is saddled with the same gerrymandered districts that the House has long held for itself. That was a compromise we had to make, accepting those existing district lines -- the rationale being the ability to compare performance of the elected Senate with that of the sortitioned Chamber. We would have preferred districts based on watersheds since water is the most crucial -- and apolitical -- bond for creating shared local interests. We didn't get that but there is still the inherited geographic dimension. The big difference in the Chamber is that the representative is no longer one approved by whatever party had been geographically dominant.

More important than the issue of location, though, was the criticism that the sortitioned would not be beholden to a constituency ... that they would have no allegiances. Without a shred of shame the parties shouted that there would be 'No one in Congress to bring home the bacon!' Glad to say that backfired since it never had been more than a minority of special interests that actually ever received that fat.

But citizens were concerned they would have nowhere to go to complain about government services. After explaining that Congress was never originally intended to reply to constituent complaints nor to provide so-called constituent 'services',<sup>6</sup> we successfully argued for robust local ombudsmen to handle those complaints and to provide those services.<sup>7</sup>

The last ditch effort of parties to scuttle sortition -- they called it a 'crapshoot' -- came when they tried confusing the people by supporting 'proportional representation'. This was particularly irksome since politicians and their parties had long resisted efforts in that direction, bemoaning it as 'cutting their own throats'.

But that support was only for what 'proportional representation' meant a quarter century ago ... when it was, in fact, a progressive step -- actually a leapfrog over the U.S. At that time this country was so self-satisfied with having 'given' the world modern 'democracy' back in 1776 and 1787 that it hadn't noticed the improvements in democratic systems made by almost every other developed democracy by the early 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

Which is to say that what the parties supported as 'proportional representation' was a means of distributing electoral gains more broadly among the parties, but not a means towards establishing a government by the people, proportional to the population,

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<sup>6</sup> Such as: contacting federal agencies for problems; nominations for military academies; providing information on obtaining federal grants; obtaining a flag that flew over the Capitol; arranging tours of the Capitol and White House; et al.

<sup>7</sup> "Let Legislators Legislate: Ombudsman for All The Rest". Narr. Lynn-Steven Walls. Future of the Nation. Natl. Public Radio. 12 Oct. 2022. LexisNexis. Web. 5 Aug. 2025. Transcript. That broadcast also predicted the explosion of civic engagement that has occurred as the result of freeing up the time and money previously spent on electioneering.

including the unaffiliated. Fortunately this last gambit also failed to hoodwink ... proving, in my opinion, the wisdom of 'the people'.

*AYM: So ... no other pending obstacles? Is there anything at all that might cause a reversal?*

DG: The President, as you know, is of the old school. Little wonder since she had to endure the competitive electoral wringer. It's the price that the meritocratically determined – the executive and the judiciary – have to pay.

She hates the Citizen Chamber. By appealing for 'highest standards' -- what with her re-working of old tropes like 'the few, the proud, the proficient' -- she seems to toy with encouraging the military to abandon its allegiance to civilian control.

This is a surprise. Many had thought the challenge would be the other way around. With the proclivity of the executive branch's professionals to guard turf and presume always to know better than the amateurs, cynics expected they would bamboozle the Chamber -- with its mere three months of training and its self-chosen support staffs.

On the contrary, the President and her bureaucrats have discovered the Chamber to be obdurate. They spin it, of course, as obtuse. To the surprise of the cynics, the wide swath of the citizenry brings with it a great deal more than simply 'common sense'. Sortition has produced, just as we always knew it would, a much wider range of expertise than the narrow band of lawyers, businessmen and professional politicians who composed most of the elected legislature<sup>8</sup>.

The President and the executive bureaucrats no longer can manipulate patronage nor can they wield the power of political party in the way they once did. The poor gal is finding herself captain of the ship of state, yes, but her paying passengers rule the direction of her executive destination like never before.

*AYM: Despite the President's discomfort, we still have a strong executive. You've indicated that there could be an eventual threat. Do you mean a coup? Do you think the safeguards will be adequate?*

DG: I don't think the situation will become that drastic. Besides the constitutional safeguards separating the branches, there is the consent of the governed. The courts do not rely only upon the force of arms to ensure obedience to their edicts. There is the will of the people, taken as a whole. The power of public consent, or dissent, asserted and proved itself in the explosion of nonviolent civic action that we saw in the last century.

*AYM: De Toqueville's speculation that a 'Tyranny of the majority' might be a threat in democracies seems to have diminished as a worry -- especially given that there seem to be fewer cohesive majorities. Do you think that bugaboo has been forever eliminated?*

DG: No, I'm not as sanguine as all that. That mass psychosis that occasionally afflicts humankind has not disappeared and likely never will. We can never be sure that the various means of prophylaxis so vigorously bruted by one professional shaman or another can be counted on as forever reliable. In the long term, it is possible to imagine -

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<sup>8</sup> Occupational backgrounds in the 120th Congress were listed as: 40% public service and politics; 42% law; 38% business; education 18% and all other occupations much less. The self-reporting allows overlap and duplication so the percentage adds up to more than 100%.

- and I say it with great heaviness of heart -- that a massive societal psychosis could overwhelm any harmonious organic order and result in retrograde annihilating folly.

You are correct, of course, to point out the greater diffusion of social types. Not merely of ethnicities or ideologies. That is, for now, a significant bulwark against tyrannical mass think. I'm less worried about ethnic strife than I am about ideological violence. That brings us to questions of ontology. About is and is not. My personhood and yours. The meaning and place of 'us'.

Not going too deeply into all of that, just let me say that I come down on the side of "Whatever We Are Is What We Deserve".

That said, and given that not everyone can or should be involved in every decision, I cannot conceive of any fairer method than sortition to ensure an accurate representation of *All Of Us*.

*We broke again. Next day I met Mr. Grant at an unusual locale -- a highway underpass. The sun streamed in brightly and despite the cool temperature, it was pleasant enough ... except for the litter: used condoms, soiled toilet paper, candy wrappers, plastic bags, broken syringes, a discarded sweatshirt, empty beverage cans and bottles, plastic straws ... all of it blowing in the wind. The only thing stable: a motorbike stripped of its parts.*

*AYM: So why did you have us meet here?*

DG: Because I was expecting you to begin asking about the effects of the underclass.

*AYM: You are right. My next question was to have been: How do you respond to those who decry sortition as inevitably leading to mediocrity?*

DG: Your question is softer than I expected.

I thought you'd bring up the assertion that the lack of an institutional memory would make the legislative body decline to a lowest common denominator, not only to a mediocre one.

*AYM: You're a better interviewer than I am.*

DG: We sit here in the beauty of nature. Blue sky, bright sun, a field of green grass. There is the sound of traffic and a train in the distance. We live in a constructed civilization. But nature -- the air we breathe -- is irreplaceable.

Nature is the median-maker. Neither lowest nor highest denominator. Nature is greater than mathematics, despite what my mathematician friends might say. They pointed me to the deeper aspects of sortition: chaos theory, randomness, the Law of Large Numbers, fractals, Schroedinger's cat, Emergence...

What the hell, I might as well go into the mystical and metaphysical. The whole is greater than the sum of its parts. Now that we have 'a whole' -- the body politic in all of its strengths and in all of its shortcomings -- we will see a Greater Whole arise from it.

No, we aren't going to have, as we did before, a preponderance of well-spoken rhetoricians. The tenor of debate is going to range from reticent to raucous. Thus far the sortitional Chamber has acted responsibly and conservatively as expected of representatives coming, proportional to the population, mostly from middle class backgrounds.

I'm optimistic enough to think that it won't be long before they become more certain of themselves, more willing to press for policies that will make places like this less likely. Sure, 'the poor will always be with us' but the 'poor in spirit' need not suffer despair and disgrace.

*AYM: What about the lack of an institutional memory?*

DG: That concern has always been a serious one. In my original film I interviewed a former Congressman whose main argument against sortition was exactly this point. He asserted that longevity mattered ... that experience taught legislators how to see through chicanery and falsehood. My rejoinder was that I thought the Fourth Estate, in all of its forms, would continue as part of the nation's repository of memory. Furthermore I also argued that a broader spectrum of the population – much closer to a proportional representation of the population – would bring a wider spectrum of experience to bear. In other words, as I have never tired of repeating: I believe we can trust the American people.

*AYM: You have predicted a controversial long-term benefit: that societal-wide distribution of leadership experience will eventually result in a diminishment of the central government. With what confidence can you maintain that likelihood?*

DG: Since this effect will take another generation, I won't be around to see it.

Places like this should have disappeared decades ago. I'd like to see The Greater Whole be ashamed of itself for debasing this beautiful earth.

Whether or not the universe bends towards justice or declines towards entropy isn't something we can conclude. I admit my assertion of the rise of an inevitable organic order without a significant central government is nothing more than an hypothesis, yet to be proven.

Too bad I won't be around to see the proof. In any case I'm happy I was able to play a role in ending the sham and beginning this first-time-in-history, truly representational democracy. And to think [laughing] we did it with 'a crapshoot'.

*AYM: What about the criticism that the 'proportion' in the Citizen Chamber really isn't proportional? Since a person must actively volunteer her- or himself into the sortitional pool by registering, and must furthermore demonstrate a minimal understanding of civics<sup>9</sup>, the Citizen Chamber's fails to reflect the population within the 1-to-2% discrepancy predicted by the Law of Large Numbers.*

DG: For a long time we were accused of trying to have it both ways – 'proportional by the numbers' but also 'skewed by registration and qualification'. At first we apologized for that, saying it was a temporary flaw. We considered another model -- that service should be mandatory and that the lot should be used only to determine rotation of the duty. But we rejected that on grounds of 'Freedom to say No'.

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<sup>9</sup> I pressed him about this well-known controversy in light of the legal and political challenges to the civics test as aired in: Musselman, Ross. "Settling the Question of Civic Competence: Testing the Common Lot". *This Noble Undertaking: Proceedings of the Tenth Research Symposium of the International Political Science Institute*, Utrecht, 19-20 January 2025. Ed. Anke Kooke. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2026. 173-88. Print.

We also argued that it wouldn't take long for all citizens to realize how important it was for everyone to place themselves in the pool ... even those citizens who might feel their jobs were too important or too lucrative or otherwise too comfortable. Or, in the other direction, for those citizens who were humble to the point of doubting their ability to contribute for the three-year duty. We tried to ameliorate these concerns by instituting legal protections to assure jobs will not be lost as a result of service. To make service more attractive we set compensation at 150% of the national household mean, assuring that for 75% of the population, service will be a step up.

Despite those efforts, though, this first Citizen Chamber has a 7-8% discrepancy from what would be predicted in a 'pure' sortition. I am intrigued by a recent article<sup>10</sup> that argues that this discrepancy will not, and should not, disappear. And that, furthermore, the populace will come to see this as a proper and natural development, appropriate for an efficient and fair 'government by the people'. I suppose this is another of those things we'll have to wait to see how it turns out.

*AYM: Why did you not take more of a public role? You stayed in the background even as your productions were so influential in driving the change.*

DG: I already mentioned how much I feared the seductions of power. From early on. The little tastes of fame I had as a young man were too close to what I imagined addiction to heroin to be. I also am not fond of repeating myself so the idea of barnstorming did not appeal. Nor was I much of a debater. Luckily there were others who enjoyed all of that.

Though I'm not a loner I do enjoy the freedom of -- if not anonymity -- at least a low-profile. I'm prone to letting people take over my time and I needed that time to produce the performances and media that captured the popular imagination and ultimately carried the day.

*AYM: Having started Common Lot Productions at the age of 65, you've said it was to be your 'culminating career'. You remain vigorous and active now at 85. Do you have an 'encore' in mind?*

EG: Good question. I ask it of myself as well.

Until establishing Common Lot Productions, I had moved from one activity to another, never staying in one place longer than a few years. When people asked me if I didn't feel rootless, I'd say that -- as much as I love forests -- I wasn't a tree. Why not be an alga, floating along in life? At the time when I began I was living on a houseboat on the Potomac River, only a half-hour walk from the Capitol. So ... literally living in a floating world.

Furthermore, I heeded the advice of Ashley Montagu<sup>11</sup> ... funny the way certain little sayings stick ... "Don't specialize until you're sixty," he said. I was a bit later than that, a late bloomer.

I remember my first girlfriend saying to me when we met again late in life ... She agreed with me without a blink ... when I laughed that I still wasn't grown up.

So ... OK, Common Lot was my first specialization. An encore would be nice. Why not?

<sup>10</sup> Sayre, Jr., R. F. "We're All In It Together ... And It's a SuperEgg" *American Journal of Political Science*, Iowa City, 16 August 2029. Ed. David Marshall. 38-50. Print.

<sup>11</sup> British-American anthropologist and humanist, 1905-1999.

Something not as demanding of initiative. I'm happy to play the role of Wise Elder, but one who remembers also to "Question Authority" -- with the proviso, learned at some cost, that questioners need to accord honor to the sweat equity of the 'author'.

*AYM: So what for an encore?*

DG: Not a 'career' but something new, yes. Music maybe. Something social. With others. Something playful at any rate.

*Homo Ludens*<sup>12</sup> – I read it in the original Dutch -- always was a catalyst and a lodestone guiding my Way.

*AYM: Looking far back in the other direction, the past, what influences of your childhood and upbringing were most important?*

Oh, son ... so you want me to visit the past, my own? Let's take a break.

This place is sad. With the day warming up, there are flies and I smell feces.

*Next day Mr. Grant was taking a train to the mountains to see his daughter. I tagged along for the first hours to complete the interview.*

*AYM: I was asking about influences in your childhood and upbringing.*

DG: Fist fighting early. Because of skin color, though I didn't quite understand it that way. It confused me when anyone commented ... or, on the schoolyard, hit me ... about it. I learned to win those fights mostly by making the attackers my friends.

The main influence then came through trusting my buddies. Over against adult bad behaviors. That included the tactic of clowning for the hell of it.

Wait.

You want influences not outcomes, right? OK.

Old Nancy whispering the story of David and Goliath. My bicycle, the thing itself, a means to explore the whole wide world. Baseball and basketball – demanders of demonstrated, in-your-face and at-the-moment competence. Of course my parents, one for getting hands dirty; the other for raising expectations.

Singled out to talk about serendipity on the radio. A stint as a scavenger for a soup kitchen. Bricolage when the opportunity arose. Friends who risked their lives for me.

*AYM: What changes during your lifetime -- technological and social -- have made the difference ... have created a public willing to trust its own self?*

DG: The breaking open of lines of communication. No longer was speech 'free' only for those who owned the technology.

In the last decades we can see an inherent order emerging from the cacophony. As said, I and many others expect this to result in a much diminished role for a central government.

*AYM: Your life has been a curious mixture of concern about relationship and tolerance and living together without fear or violence ... and yet you've spent a lot of time alone*

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<sup>12</sup> Huzinga, Johan. *Homo Ludens, A Study of the Play Element in Culture*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1955. Print.

*and have had a series of marriages and romantic involvements. What can you say about the connection between your private and public lives?*

DG: What can't I say? I'm not interested celebrity gossip. Let the moment be, moment by moment. The rest is for historians.

*AYM: About your financial circumstances ... When you created Common Lot, what caused you to abandon your previous intention to make as little money as possible?*

DG: I was able to start Common Lot Productions thanks in part to the little financial padding I was given when my mother died. Before that I'd admired and, as you say, had aspired to that photo of Gandhi's material legacy, the one showing how little he owned upon his death:



Photograph from the M.K. Gandhi Institute for Nonviolence.

I learned later that one of Gandhi's assistants had complained to him: "It takes a lot of money to keep you so poor". So, I faced up to quotidian facts and decided I wanted to leave something for my children, as I had been given. Not a lot. But something.

Furthermore, since I'd worked for so little for so long I thought it unlikely I would succumb to money's blandishments. I think I've been able to contribute with the money I've made in a way different from, but at least as valuable as, when I was volunteering or working for low wages. I doubt if I've caught up yet to what would have been my projected income, given my education and the inherited economic class. But honestly this topic holds little interest for me.

*AYM: Your sister was an important lever, you have said. What do you mean by that?*

DG: As the first born I had to suffer jealousy of her as intruder on my stage and also as Other, as female. It was a long slow learning. I was slow.

I hope the women in my life would attest I did, finally, learn something.

My sister also had a sense of history that I found burdensome. But it's not something to be discarded either. I thank her for holding it.

I'm glad to say that her account of our family has gone back into print after all these years.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Grant, Gail Milissa. *At the Elbows of My Elders: One Family's Journey Toward Civil Rights*. St. Louis: Missouri History Museum, 2027. Print.

*AYM: You moved often. What made you choose to live your last years here?*

These questions are no longer about What but about Who. To be polite I'll answer. But briefly.

I always wanted to be a cowboy. So now I am.

*AYM: Speaking of Gandhi, he famously tried to treat his children just as he treated anyone else. You never aspired to that.*

DG: Remember his autobiography was titled “An Experiment [in Truth]<sup>14</sup>”. That experiment was a dumb one, treating his children like anyone else. It wasn't the first time he let ideology unwisely overrule his heart.

*AYM: Are you satisfied with the direction the Citizen Chamber is going?*

DG: Yes, I am.

When the tipping point was reached -- thanks to the comedic interactive television series<sup>15</sup> that the feature film<sup>16</sup> spawned ... that really mainstreamed the vision, with viewers themselves responding as ersatz representatives in real time, dealing with real issues, acting like a shadow government ... enthusiasm peaked. In fact it created exorbitant expectations. I was ... and still am ... concerned that the actual working of the Citizen Chamber will be less dramatic and less effective and more mundane and more cautious than that enthusiasm portended. I only hope expectations are lowered to meet the reality and that the long-term benefits swiftly become evident. That will encourage maintaining the system.

*AYM: What will be your parting words? Your deathbed words?*

DG: We'll never know until we get there.

*Mr. Grant smiled his smile of enigma – of smirk and of sufferance. Was he speaking his epitaph or continuing his journey? I might have asked but the train neared my stop. As I thank him, collecting my things, he asked me if anything he had said had surprised me. I replied that the biggest surprise was that, as much as I had admired him going into and exiting the interview sessions, I was leaving this train with a new certainty that my path would not – could not, should not – follow in his or anyone's footsteps*

*His beaming eyes lost all semblance of irony or insouciance as he said  
'Gratefulness is the heart of prayer.'  
I took my leave and he took his.*

Submitted by 'a younger man'  
c/o David Grant  
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<sup>14</sup> Gandhi, Mohandas. *The Story of My Experiments With Truth*. Navajivan Trust. 1927. Print.

<sup>15</sup> “Our Common Lot: Government By *We The People*”. Arts and Entertainment Network. 2020-2025. Television series.

<sup>16</sup> *The Common Lot: Next Step for Democracy*. Screenplay by David Grant. Dir. Hank Topper. Miramax. 2018. Film.



THEN AND NOW AND WHAT'S AHEAD

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