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# Quotes by Lapham, Lewis H.

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The figure of the enthusiast who has just discovered jogging or a new way to fix tofu can be said to stand or, more accurately, to tremble on the threshold of conversion, as the representative American.

- Lapham, Lewis H.

The supply of government exceeds demand.

- Lapham, Lewis H.

Except in a few well-publicized instances (enough to lend credence to the iconography painted on the walls of the media), the rigorous practice of rugged individualism usually leads to poverty, ostracism and disgrace. The rugged individualist is too often mistaken for the misfit, the maverick, the spoilsport, the sore thumb.

- Lapham, Lewis H.

Whether lawyer, politician or executive, the American who knows what's good for his career seeks an institutional rather than an individual identity. He becomes the man from NBC or IBM. The institutional imprint furnishes him with pension, meaning, proofs of existence. A man without a company name is a man without a country.

- Lapham, Lewis H.

More than illness or death, the American journalist fears standing alone against the whim of his owners or the prejudices of his audience. Deprive William Safire of the insignia of the New York Times, and he would have a hard time selling his truths to a weekly broadsheet in suburban Duluth.

- Lapham, Lewis H.

Most of the ladies and gentlemen who mourn the passing of the nation's leaders wouldn't know a leader if they saw one. If they had the bad luck to come across a leader, they would find out that he might demand something from them, and this impertinence would put an abrupt and indignant end to their wish for his return.

- Lapham, Lewis H.

Money is like fire, an element as little troubled by moralizing as earth, air and water. Men can employ it as a tool or they can dance around it as if it were the incarnation of a god. Money votes socialist or monarchist, finds a profit in pornography or translations from the Bible, commissions Rembrandt and underwrites the technology of Auschwitz. It acquires its meaning from the uses to which it is put.

- Lapham, Lewis H.

We might make a public moan in the newspapers about the decay of conscience, but in private conversation, no matter what crimes a man may have committed or how cynically he may have debased his talent or his friends, variations on the answer Yes, but I did it for the money, satisfy all but the most tiresome objections.

- Lapham, Lewis H.

Under the rules of a society that cannot distinguish between profit and profiteering, between money defined as necessity and money defined as luxury, murder is occasionally obligatory and always permissible.

- Lapham, Lewis H.

I never can pass by the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York without thinking of it not as a gallery of living portraits but as a cemetery of tax-deductible wealth.

- Lapham, Lewis H.

It is no accident that banks resemble temples, preferably Greek, and that the supplicants who come to perform the rites of deposit and withdrawal instinctively lower their voices into the registers of awe. Even the most junior tellers acquire within weeks of their employment the officiousness of hierophants tending an eternal flame. I don't know how they become so quickly inducted into the presiding mysteries, or who instructs them in the finely articulated inflections of contempt for the laity, but somehow they learn to think of themselves as suppliers of the monetarized DNA that is the breath of life.

- Lapham, Lewis H.

Seeing is believing, and if an American success is to count for anything in the world it must be clothed in the raiment of property. As often as not it isn't the money itself that means anything; it is the use of money as the currency of the soul.

- Lapham, Lewis H.

Among all the emotions, the rich have the least talent for love. It is possible to love one's dog, dress or duck-shooting hat, but a human being presents a more difficult problem. The rich might wish to experience feelings of affection, but it is almost impossible to chip away the enamel of their narcissism. They take up all the space in all the mirrors in the house. Their children, who represent the most present and therefore the most annoying claim on their attention, usually receive the brunt of their irritation.

- Lapham, Lewis H.

A certain kind of rich man afflicted with the symptoms of moral dandyism sooner or later comes to the conclusion that it isn't enough merely to make money. He feels obliged to hold views, to espouse causes and elect Presidents, to explain to a trembling world how and why the world went wrong. The spectacle is nearly always comic.

- Lapham, Lewis H.

Unlike any other business in the United States, sports must preserve an illusion of perfect innocence. The mounting of this illusion defines the purpose and accounts for the immense wealth of American sports. It is the ceremony of innocence that the fans pay to see -- not the game or the match or the bout, but the ritual portrayal of a world in which time stops and all hope remains plausible, in which everybody present can recover the blameless expectations of a child, where the forces of light always triumph over the powers of darkness.

- Lapham, Lewis H.

The genius of capitalism consists precisely in its lack of morality. Unless he is rich enough to hire his own choir, a capitalist is a fellow who, by definition, can ill afford to believe in anything other than the doctrine of the bottom line. Deprive a capitalist of his God-given right to lie and cheat and steal, and the poor sap stands a better than even chance of becoming one of the abominable wards of the state from whose grimy fingers the Reagan Administration hopes to snatch the ark of democracy.

- Lapham, Lewis H.

To the United States the Third World often takes the form of a black woman who has been made pregnant in a moment of passion and who shows up one day in the reception room on the forty-ninth floor threatening to make a scene. The lawyers pay the woman off; sometimes uniformed guards accompany her to the elevators.

- Lapham, Lewis H.

A society that presumes a norm of violence and celebrates aggression, whether in the subway, on the football field, or in the conduct of its business, cannot help making celebrities of the people who would destroy it.

- Lapham, Lewis H.

The more prosperous and settled a nation, the more readily it tends to think of war as a regrettable accident; to nations less fortunate the chance of war presents itself as a possible bountiful friend.

- Lapham, Lewis H.

Talk about the flag or drugs or crime (never about race or class or justice) and follow the yellow brick road to the wonderful land of consensus. In place of honest argument among consenting adults the politicians substitute a lullaby for frightened children: the pretense that conflict doesn't really exist, that we have achieved the blessed state in which we no longer need politics.

- Lapham, Lewis H.

The national distrust of the contemplative temperament arises less from an innate Philistinism than from a suspicion of anything that cannot be counted, stuffed, framed or mounted over the fireplace in the den.

- Lapham, Lewis H.





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