

American Born, addicted to Happiness

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Last week, as I do every November 22, I reflected again on that day in Dallas forty-one years ago, my second year in college, when John F. Kennedy was assassinated. After reading Wayne Madsen's fine article on the increasing inaccessibility to visitors of the grave of JFK in Arlington National Cemetery in 2004 (www.copvicia.com), I pondered once more not only the unresolved and unanswered questions of November 22, 1963, but the lingering, lethal legacy of that moment in history which is now being visited upon America in the twenty-first century. As an historian, I am frequently confronted with the agonizing consequences of human history, including humanity's sins of omission.

I do not wish to re-hash the details of the assassination. Any astute researcher who is not serving the interests of the Central Intelligence Agency is forced to conclude that the murder of JFK was a complicated and meticulously organized coup which guaranteed the unscathed longevity of the military industrial complex and the political pre-eminence of the CIA for decades thereafter. My generation was never sufficiently committed to solving the crime of the assassination. It was much easier for us to protest the Vietnam War, revel in the counterculture we were creating, and convince ourselves that the JFK assassination was only one piece of the pie and that the revolution we thought we were creating would inevitably reveal all of its mysteries. But the revolution didn't happen, and wounds to the psyche, whether individual or collective, do not simply vanish. As a nation, we paid, and are still paying a price, for the crime for which we refused to demand justice. What is more, we have repeated history by passively submitting to yet another "Warren Commission" (the 9-11 Commission), as yet another coup d'état, the U.S. government-orchestrated atrocities of September 11, 2001, fade into distant memory. As Mike Ruppert reminded his audience in his Portland State University lecture of 2001 regarding the Kennedy assassination and the 9-11 hoax, "the bills are coming due, and now it's your turn to pay."

The Bush coup of shamelessly rigged elections in November, 2000 paved the way for illegal mid-term "elections" throughout the country in 2002 and the most recent chapter in the overthrow of the American republic, the pseudo-election of 2004. These events ended democratic elections in the United States and guaranteed that within the next decade we will see the neocon agenda and all its horrors unleashed on the world and on the American people. It will be anything but a pretty picture.

The majority of responses to my articles contain some plea for a solution:

“What can we do?” goes the plaintive wail. While I am willing to offer suggestions, I have come to believe that the most important and useful one at this point would be: “Become willing to suffer.” Now, before you toss this article and pull the covers over your head, please hear me out. You will suffer in the next few years, whether you are willing or not, but your resistance to it can only exacerbate your misery.

I enjoy conversing with individuals not born in the United States. Their perspective is truly refreshing because almost without exception, their countries of origin have at some time experienced war, famine, revolution, corruption, or abject poverty. They have no Declaration of Independence that entitles them to “life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.” Consequently, they are much more open to hearing “bad news” and have fewer questions about how to “fix” it.

I hasten to add that Jefferson’s original phrase in the Declaration was “life, liberty and the pursuit of property.” Let us not forget that the profits from a capitalist land-conquering, land-holding system, not happiness, was the original intent of our founding fathers. Like the founders, the ruling elite of our day find “happiness” in ownership—hence Bush’s Orwellian “ownership society.”

Americans, even so-called Progressives it seems, appear to be fixated in an eternal adolescence that wants to repair adversity as quickly as possible without living it, or God forbid, learning from it. One facet of maturity is the awareness that the challenges of human existence are rarely simplistic, usually fraught with complexity, and typically last much longer than we ever dreamed we could endure them. As a result, we inwardly (or outwardly) roll our eyes at the adolescents in our lives who insist on taking the path of least resistance as quickly as possible. Yet, like adolescents, we refuse to face the reality that clean, fair, democratic elections no longer exist in our country, if they ever did. Like puerile MTV viewers, we demand that the right politician, the right book, the right motivational speaker, the right spiritual teacher, the right journalist tell us what to do and make it “all better” so that we can avoid suffering. We lament that the uninformed populace around us doesn’t want to hear any bad news, but the real truth is, neither do we.

One of the hallmarks of adulthood versus adolescence is the awareness that mistakes have consequences. Recently, a foreign-born friend of mine asked why the American people believe that they have the right to expand, exploit, rape, pillage, murder and conquer every area of the planet. I could only answer by explaining the history of the United States—an epic saga of what my friend had just verbalized. Indeed, the bills are coming due, and unfortunately, it is now time for us to pay.

During the next four years, the Bush Administration plans to screen all Americans for mental illness (http://www.worldnetdaily.com/news/article.asp?ARTICLE_ID=39078).The intent of the Bush mental health screening plan is not to legitimately diagnose and treat mental illness but rather determine who needs to be labeled “mentally unstable” or “subversive”

and who needs to be medicated by the pharmaceutical industry from which the administration has added handsomely to its campaign coffers. Moreover, if the administration had the slightest interest in alleviating mental illness, it would have to begin with Lunatic In Chief, George W. Tragically, the nation is as mentally ill as its president, not only because the population has been entranced by the psuedo-Christian fascist paranoia of the religious right, but because overwhelmingly, most of us are pathologically “addicted to happiness.” As the psychologist Carl Jung noted “the foundation of all mental illness is the avoidance of legitimate suffering.”

Before anyone calls me a masochist, please hear me out. We live in a painful, uncertain, dangerous, heartless world. I hear the reader saying: “I have already suffered and hold many badges of courage or at the very least, survival, and I really don’t want to surrender to further suffering because I have had quite enough, thank you very much.” But let us also remember that as Americans, we do not have the perspective on suffering that most other citizens of the world have, nor will we until we experience similar adversities.

Our children are unlikely to demand an end to a perpetual war on terrorism until they hold draft cards in their wallets which have been sucked dry by that war’s astronomical debt. We may never cherish our communities until we and our neighbors have to depend on each other for food and basic necessities of life. The preciousness of our resources will not be fully appreciated until they disappear or become very difficult to acquire.

People often ask me if I plan to leave the country. My answer: “There’s nowhere to go.” Within the next decade we are likely to see a nuclear exchange, a dirty bomb exploded in the U.S. as well as in other parts of the world, the return of the draft, the criminalization of abortion and women who have them, the suspension of the Constitution, a full-blown police state, the end of health care entirely except for the very wealthy, and an economic catastrophe in America that will make 1929 look like a cornucopia of abundance. Add to this every form of pollution humankind has created within the past century, the end of clean air and water, and intolerable climate changes resulting from global warming.

I noticed on November 3, 2004 that we were no longer living merely in the territory of political solutions or issues of social justice, but had crossed a watershed moment in history into the landscape of collective anguish that might test our mettle as a people and as individuals like nothing Americans have previously experienced.

Throughout history, citizens of nations in torment have responded in a variety of ways. Some quite naturally want to die and escape the pain. Others prefer to “fiddle” as long as possible while Rome burns. Others join resistance movements or become healers or teachers.

Surely by now, some reader is screaming: “But where is the hope?”

I can't answer that question at this moment. That is to say, I can't give you hope. Hope is something we all must construct in the laboratory of our own suffering.

What I do know is that as Americans, we are "hooked on hope" but generally unwilling to confront the suffering that allows us to find hope. Genuine hope is never found when we feel comfortable, affluent, safe, and secure. Ask Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Mother Teresa, or Rosa Parks.

Perhaps the poet, T.S. Eliot, said it best:

I said to my soul, be still, and wait without hope
For hope would be hope for the wrong thing; wait without love
For love would be love of the wrong thing; there is yet faith
But the faith and the love and the hope are all in the waiting,
Wait without thought, for you are not ready for thought;
So the darkness shall be the light, and the stillness the dancing.

As we enter the dark time of year, and perhaps one of the darkest times in modern history, we celebrate in the Judeo-Christian tradition, the coming of the light. Darkness has never been able to unequivocally obliterate it. All great traditions and spiritual teachers declare that human existence is largely comprised of adversity interspersed with moments of light, beauty, and joy.

They have also admonished us to remember that without suffering, there will never be transformation. The days of simply applying bandaids to America's deplorably corrupt and unjust political, economic, and social institutions are over.

It appears that nothing less than total transformation is being demanded of us.

My wish for every American in 2005 is that we recover from our addiction to happiness—our refusal to hear, ponder, and struggle with "bad news", and with informed, illumined minds and hearts, allow the darkness to be our teacher.

That very "un-American" path may be our only hope for creating a new world

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