

Ancient History, Hot off the Presses

Written by Alex Baer

Thursday, 11 October 2012 16:50

Anything that happened yesterday is still news, while last month's headlines get sifted into the heap of modern-day discards. If you want to reflect on the America of the 1940s -- or even the 1980s -- then you're obviously an archeologist on a mission.

Unless you're summarizing the most recent yak-fest -- the so-called presidential debates. You remember: The ones marketed by hucksters like cage matches from two new species only just now discovered in wildest Borneo.

You know: *The Distracted Professor versus the Gish Galloper Extraordinaire!*

One way to reframe the lingering, post-event aftertaste: You were watching a hot-air duel that could really have been broadcast skips on the chilled atmosphere from just after World War Two, colliding with torrid blasts from the Reagan era, when the hot air really got superheated and shoved around.

Each candidate espoused the spirit, if not the exact talking points, that would have been more common 30 and 60-plus years ago.

On the one hand, there was discussion from a point of view that insisted that *We're All in This Together*. The
opposing view came directly from one of this century's leading poster boys for *Greed is Good*.

Aside from the underlying philosophies on view, we also witnessed a technological time warp, too: Those who listened on radio thought Obama won; those who watched the proceedings on teevee were convinced Romney did.

That's a perception difference that cleaves right along the fracture lines of candidates' basic views. Not sure about that?

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Imagine those fireside chats from FDR, the whole family clustered around their radio sets, then envision those superheated conduits and teevee circuits of the 80s *Greed Decade*, stoked from the beginning blazes of the *Me Decade*

If we can understand how it was we transitioned so fast from societal altruism to personal greed, we might have half a chance to dissolve the political knots that assemble themselves so tightly around the two polar opposites dividing us.

We may even be able to have civil conversations and discussions about politics once again, if we can remember which pair of pants we last left our *Ability to Compromise* in.

It's a longshot, of course, in an era where the meme and the mode is to win at all costs, especially by grinding down the opposition to a bloody pulp -- but it's worth a try. Otherwise, we'll be left circling our increasingly polarized orbits, locked at opposite ends, as we are now.

Of course, that effort presupposes Americans are again ready to take a calm, informed, intelligent, educated look at the facts.

However, many Americans may have not yet gone through enough spiral-eyed, tea-scented agony and fits to shrug off their emotionally-stoked firestorms. Could be a majority of Americans is just not yet collectively ready for that cycle of renewal that's needed -- let alone ready to start making and hearing sentences with the word "collective" in them.

Sounds like commies and socialism -- right?

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What were those expressions, again -- something about divide and conquer, but united we stand...

Our parents and grandparents probably knew. □ They were adults. □ We actually saw them compromise, collectively, together.

And, we saw the country grow, like never before.

All the forces and movements that thundered beneath their feet, by virtue of their handiwork, really spoke that everyone was in this together: □ Social Security, civil rights, banking reforms, trade unions and the right to bargain collectively, civil rights...

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It's always interesting to see what will be considered acceptable behavior, era to era -- and, by "interesting," I mean some combination of amusing, horrifying, stunning, shocking, mind-numbing, and so on.

For the *We're All in This Together* folks, the only acceptable things for them were solutions that actually worked, and worked for the many -- not just the few.

For the *Greed is Good* crowd that followed, any amount of lip service, lying, cheating, hypocrisy, and outright theft was plenty good enough.

A quick look around at American history since 2000 will easily, effortlessly afford you confirmation of the view that won a majority of converts, and is currently winning.

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If we could extract the gluey essence of the Great Depression from that over-tested generation who stuck together, and whose reward would then be to go on and experience more privations and mind-bending, back-breaking tests at the hands of World War Two, we might have a clue which way we should go next.

Those people *really* stuck together. They helped one another through. It was not a throwaway expression for them, but their life motto and daily bread: *We're All in This Together.*

As it is, very few of us have any concept of that level of ongoing, near-crushing want. Most of us have no concept of forced or enforced sacrifice. How could we? We are the children of the *Greed is Good* generation.

And our own children have grown up in that harsh light, the greed continuing to polish its fine points. We've been graduated, *summa cum laude*, to the following new classes:

- *Pull Harder on Your Bootstraps.*
- *It's Your Own Fault if You're Poor.*
- *Greed is my Co-Pilot.*
- *Greed is my God.*
- *I've Got Mine, So Screw You.*

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Funny thing, "consumption" used to be the name of a disease. It still is, of course, but so few see it that way. More difficult to do so all the time, with consumption sucking up 70 percent of the economy.

And by "funny," I suppose I mean "peculiar." In the same way that "doing the marketing" used to mean going to get groceries, where now it just refers to performing tasks marshalled under

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the science of separating people from their money.

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So, here we are: 2012 -- the 21st century. But, there's no flying cars, and there's no pair of rocket backpacks in every pot, either.

Seems pretty obvious how things are shaking out, and equally obvious that we could use one *helluva* lot more of one philosophy and a *helluva* lot less of the other.

But, then -- you already knew that, in your heart of hearts, long before you were sucked in to watching, or listening, to that cage match, live from wildest Borneo.

If you didn't already realize it, you were catching an instant replay of ancient history.

Gish Galloping:

<http://www.dailykos.com/story/2012/10/04/1139926/-Romney-Won-Using-a-Debate-Technique-Called-the-Gish-Gallop>