

About that Hope and Change...

Written by Alex Baer

Wednesday, 23 May 2012 10:38 - Last Updated Wednesday, 23 May 2012 10:44

I've been thinking some -- stewing, really -- trying to get beyond my own reactions to the moment-to-moment outrages, disastrous pratfalls, and assorted, sordid fits characterizing signs of life in our culture and society.

Any number of daily afflictions work us like racehorses at finish lines, galloping us into short attention spans, no time to fix anything, barely enough time to keep track of even half of what's sliding sideways underfoot.

Closely observing politics and its practitioners is a game surely not for the weak-hearted, even less so when the stakes are highest, and the entire country seems to be riding a betting line of poor odds.

What is saddest is not my own disappointment at the mad state our country has become in so many ways, but the commodious gap between who we are pushed into being as a country by so few, and then, on reflection, by who we could truly be -- even may yet be, should we be suddenly drawn to the hard work done by our forebears.

In the skies, Destiny is charted in the stars; on Earth, it is measured more fundamentally, in blood and sweat. And, yes, some still have tears left to give, too.

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While we wait for actual leaders -- towering statesmen and stateswomen on the order of Vermont's Sen. Bernie Sanders -- to emerge in great numbers from the yammering, mooing herd of kowtowing, pipsqueak, party-line squatters, we are left idly considering the spirit and words of U.S. Supreme Court Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes, who gave us many remarkable opinions and memorable phrases.

One is his famous, "clear and present danger" opinion, which seems to apply more and more. Another is, "Taxes are what we pay for civilized society."

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Holmes understood the nature and value of an entrance fee, of the concept regarding many hands making light work. Since then, a very different U.S. Supreme Court ended democracy on December 12, 2000, and it has been a riotous rebirth of Robber Barons ever since -- giveaways to the insanely wealthy, free-for-all nightmares of withering greed, and the constant highjacking and looting of the Treasury.

Who else but Republicans could claim to be fiscal conservatives on the one hand, while giving away slices of the nation's future, *ad infinitum*, nearly bankrupting the entire country -- while remaining popular the entire time, granted not just one term by partisan judges, but rewarded for poor behavior with a second term by a spooked, frazzled population?

After all, credit where it's due: It takes a lot of determined effort to crank up two major wars and side-skirmishes based on lies, while simultaneously slashing taxes and regulatory restraints for rich friends and corporations already paying absurdly low taxes, if any -- perhaps gaining refunds on billions in profits. Fear was the key, and they leaned on that -- and us all -- quite hard, and for eight interminable years.

In the humble, household equivalent that GOP office runners dearly love to invoke, which is the sacred, kitchen-table gathering, it would be as if a family suddenly announced it had quit its jobs, and, for starters, scheduled first-class, top-of-the-line, all-expenses-paid, round-the-world cruises, resort trips, and bacchanal junkets for the foreseeable future -- funded carte blanche by crisscrossed lines and lines of descendants not yet conceived, let alone not yet born.

The family, to complete the picture, then decided after a quick vote of some of its members, they'd really start in on the spending, once they got warmed up. *After all, a billion here, a billion there, pretty soon you're talking real money.*

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Another Holmes, Sherlock by name, can be consistently relied on for clarity: "When you have eliminated the impossible, whatever remains, however improbable, must be the truth."

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Under the George W. Bush administration, *aka* the "Mission Accomplished" team, the national debt increased by five trillion dollars. The debt ceiling was raised seven times without incident, without whining, without balking, and with no threats of holding the country hostage.

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One way to describe what only *one* trillion dollars looks like:

Take a \$10,000 packet of hundred-dollar bills: It's less than half an inch thick. Stack 100 packets, you've got a million, good to go in a sack. A hundred million bucks requires a pallet to stack neatly, about waist-high. Ten pallets, and you're up to a billion. And a trillion? It's a one with 12 trailing zeroes, a million million, or, a thousand billion.

Now, take *five* of these sets. *That's* what a five-trillion dollar legacy looks like -- quite a gift for spending, in just eight years.

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Back to stewing my brain in the juices of our days, here's what I've come up with so far:

As long as wolf packs of war criminals from the Bush administration are allowed to run free, hawking books with fawning teevee hosts, harvesting hefty speaking fees, gleefully bragging about the extent of their Crimes of the Century and Millennium, nothing will change. And:

- As long as money soaks and poisons our political system, nothing will change.
- As long as corporations are people, nothing will change.
- As long as it is legal to lie when broadcasting the news, nothing will change.
- As long as we hunch together in superstition instead of standing tall in reason, nothing will change.

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- As long as the fiction exists that the Tea Party was and is a grassroots movement, nothing will change.
- As long as the fiction exists that civilization and society for hundreds of millions of people costs nothing to maintain and that taxes should be scrapped, nothing will change.
- As long as more people turn out to see a hot-new movie than vote, nothing will change.
- As long as lawmakers babble and dabble endlessly in moronic nonsense -- such as ensuring Sharia Law is never practiced in the *grrrreat state of Wherever!* -- nothing will change.
- As long as religious opinion squats in classrooms as fact, nothing will change.
- As long as we allow corporations to park their profits offshore tax-free, nothing will change.
- As long as corporations are financially rewarded for moving jobs off-shore and collapsing companies at home, nothing will change.
- As long as we allow politicians to skate past us, giving non-answers, obfuscations and lies as information, nothing will change.
- As long as hate speech outsells rational thought, nothing will change.
- As long as knee-jerk propaganda can be packaged and sold as the truth to people incapable of critical thought, nothing will change.
- As long as we allow "Too Big To Fail" to hold sway and thrash us around like rag dolls in the jaws of hellhounds, nothing will change.
- As long we hold no-one's political feet to the fire over the so-called Patriot Act and NDAA, nothing will change.
- As long as we allow the fiction of unions being equal in power and reach to right-wing think tanks, PACs, and Super PACs, nothing will change.
- As long as no one objects to the TSA's groping tactics or various horrors, nothing will change.
- As long as we allow casino gambling in banking, nothing will change.
- As long as we ask no questions about pallets and pallets of disappearing cash on the way to Iraq or Afghanistan, nothing will change.
- As long as we care not a whit about missing or unaccounted Pentagon funds, nothing will change.
- As long as we say income over \$106,800 is scott-free from making Social Security contributions, nothing will change.
- As long as we avoid implementing a miniscule -- a fraction of one percent -- financial transaction tax on Wall Street, we will miss an income opportunity, and nothing will change.

- As long as we allow greed to continue to fan the flames in the financial services economy, we will keep creating cycles of bubble and bust, havoc and panic, and nothing will change.

- As long as we're fine with secretaries of millionaires paying more in taxes than their bosses, nothing will change.
- As long as we hear screeches that taxes are too high, when they are at an all-time low, nothing will change.
- As long as the 99 percent remain fooled and battle to protect the top one percent from paying a fair share of taxes, nothing will change.
- As long as we remain the sole industrial country not providing health care for its citizens,

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nothing will change.

- As long as we accept the need to outspend the entire world on war, we will be forced to endure grandiose speeches by warmongers calling for slashes on spending on critical needs for infrastructure and people, and nothing will change.

- As long as we think contradicting the U.S. Constitution is acceptable, nothing will change.

- As long as we do not ask who it is, exactly, we are killing in our wars, and why, nothing will change.

- As long as we hear and accept what we know to be lies, nothing will change.

- As long as we think changing the country for the better is up to others, nothing will change.

The list goes on like this for some time. I'm sure you have the gist of how the rest goes.

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Some societies turn out ten percent of their city populations in peaceful protest, trying to catch the attention of their titular leaders. Ten percent of anything is quite low, especially for a peaceful show of redress, until one remembers this would translate to 31 million people here, peacefully assembled on our streets, drawing attention to our beefs.

Mostly, we sprawl on sofas, distractedly signing online petitions, tickling laptops and iPads while sort-of watching teevee, writing encouraging op-ed pieces to each other, somehow still hoping for change that will not hinge on interactions with the burly, beefed-up national security state: armored riot-squad cops dressed in combat black, chemical weapons sprayed in our faces, long and unannounced detentions, the withholding of civil or human rights, court-authorized, legal, gruff-and-groping strip searches in tandem with any offense levied from parking violations on up...

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The peculiar and insidious thing about slow, purposeful steps made toward corporate rule, which is fascism, is a central trait held in common with global climate change:

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By the time it's obvious to absolutely *everyone* what is happening, it is too late to do anything. It is just too late to make any changes -- no matter how much hope you can muster.

Images to help explain various amounts of money: <http://www.pagetutor.com/trillion/index.html>