

Have We Suffered Enough?

The study of American history inevitably focuses on our wars. The Revolutionary War was longer and more bloody than most school children are taught. The British kept American prisoners on prison ships where the conditions were dirty, the food was rationed at starvation levels, and most people died of disease. As the war dragged on, Americans tired of the conflict and were split between revolutionaries and Tories. Washington rarely won a battle, but he had discipline and staying power. The United States had no Navy to speak of and ultimately was rescued by the French at Yorktown where the war finally ended. Americans were tired after the war and did their best to stay out of further European conflicts.

Just over 70 years, barely a lifetime, after the United States constitution was ratified, the Civil War erupted. Most historians at the time thought there could not be a more bloody conflict. Brother against brother slaughtered indiscriminately, with some of our most illustrious cities burned to the ground. The south took the heaviest brunt of physical destruction, but both sides wept to learn of the incredible casualty levels. Presidents, and even the generals, were known to have been teary eyed at the carnage and hospitals filled with the wounded and dying.

Barely 50 years later, World War I erupted in Europe. More than one million American doughboys were shipped to Europe and it was thought to be the bloodiest conflict that mankind had ever known. This was the war to end all wars, to bring democracy, rationalism and freedom to the entire world. In truth, World War I was brought on by excessive nationalism, ethnic divides, boundary disputes, and a failure of diplomacy. World War I was the war that no one wanted but that everyone entered with enthusiasm. The combatants crawled away from the conflict bruised, beaten, poor and depressed.

It is difficult to believe that within 20 years after the end of World War I, the world was ready for another global conflict. Tired and financially reeling from World War I, the western democracies were neither ready nor fully capable of stopping the insane ambitions of Adolf Hitler and Japanese imperialism.

After World War II, the United States embarked in an era of unparalleled prosperity. A combination of Keynesian economic pump priming, pent up demand and good management at home caused the United States economically to burst forth like a flower in springtime.

It is no wonder that after the tumultuous decades which preceded the end of World War II, the United States was ready to embrace progressivism, equality, and security. These attitudes were directly reflected in programs that we now take for granted such as social security, Medicaid/Medicare, veterans' benefits, a strong military, and a carefully regulated economic industrial sector. All of these components were thought to be necessary to assure security of a weary and matured population. Unfortunately, no one listened to the actuaries and bean counters who, throughout the '70s and '80s, fretted over the fact that there was no

new young population to pay for all of these justly deserved benefits. As the population has aged, the newcomers simply do not exist to replenish the bank that we are borrowing from.

It is for just and selfish reasons that many people on all sides of the political equation believe that illegal immigrants should be mainstreamed into American society and they would be made to pay the freight for the increasing number of American elderly. After all, it was these graying Americans who made both legal and illegal immigration possible. It was they who thrived from the cheap labor available to take care of American golf courses, swimming pools, roads and hospitals. It is the illegals who have by and large cared for our ill in hospitals and emptied bedpans in nursing homes.

No one will disagree that both George Bush and Barack Obama were correct to make money available during the Bush near depression and the Obama recovery. It is unfortunate that in the upcoming presidential election, the focus seems to be on Mit Romney's Mormonism, Barack Obama's confession of Christian faith, and the Evangelical qualities of Rick Santorum or the hypocrisy of Newt Gingrich. All of these are entertaining but largely irrelevant issues. We never worried about the Deism of Jefferson, who rewrote the Bible in his own image, or the affair that Dwight Eisenhower had in England during the World War II. We worried about leadership qualities. We debated crucial issues of the day such as whether Truman or Eisenhower could end the bloody conflict of war in Korea.

If Americans do not focus the issue on what is an appropriate American debt, and how to address it or how to deal with the tyrants in Syria and Iran, then we will deserve what we get. We may or may not elect as president the most knowledgeable expositor of the Bible. We are driven by super PACs promoting negative ads about nothing of substance. We are urged to vote based upon trite irrelevancies. In desperation Americans become turned off entirely, discouraging and good candidates from seeking office. We look to the press, through the debate process, to bring the candidates back to the realistic issues of the day but all we receive in response are platitudes, broad generalizations, and fear of specifics. Cute witticisms and biting sarcasms are quoted by the press the next day after a debate, but we still do not know what the candidates believe. Do they know what they believe?

Every American presidential election has potentially cataclysmic consequences. We are both the economic and nuclear storehouse of the world. While many nations play an important role, as goes America, so goes the prosperity and security of the world. We owe ourselves better.

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