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Slow Motion Collapse

As Jared Diamond has written and we all know from history, every society eventually collapses. Three main themes seem to repeat as precipitators: climate change (Hohokam, Aztecs, Kmer), endless war (Holy Roman Empire, Nazi Reich), and internal rot (France, China, Soviet Union). Today the U.S. has all three in spades.

Climate Change

Though we have known about climate change since 1888, we refuse to take sensible steps. Many countries are miles ahead of us. Germany has made tremendous use of solar power. Spain has the biggest solar collector. A man in Pakistan is building a solar powered car. In Sweden, they have built a solar powered airplane. In Ireland, streetlights use motion detector lights to save electricity. But in the U.S., Congress fiddles while the planet burns.

We still subsidize oil with an oil depletion allowance as if they were a start up industry though they make billions. Yet we let the subsidy for wind power expire. We are fracking for more natural gas and oil while destroying our air and water in the meantime. The gas and oil is carried off by private corporations for profit while the public suffers from and pays for the destruction of the land and water – the privatization of profit; socialization of cost.

War

The U.S. has pretty much been at war since we began as a country. We have had about seventy wars since the mid-Eighteenth Century starting with the French and Indian wars. Thirteen wars have been major and about 60 “minor” adding up to 1.5 million dead. We have had more than 130 invasions or interventions in 40 countries, many multiple times. The longest war is not Afghanistan (10 years) but Viet Nam that started in the 1950s with advisors and ended in an airlift in 1973.

Since no nation can continue to sacrifice its young on the battlefield and still thrive, we have had to hire mercenaries to carry on the wars. But mercenaries have no allegiance to the purported values of the country nor its people.

Internal Rot

We also have no shortage of internal rot. Watergate for starters showed that our president had absolutely no faith in democracy. Before that, Nixon, with the help of Kissinger, scuttled the peace talks in Paris to end the Viet Nam War so he could beat the Democrats in the election. The war went on for eight more years with the resulting deaths, maiming and cost.

Likewise, Reagan (the most scandal filled administration to date) scuttled the release of the hostages in Iran so he could beat Carter. In Irangate, he then turned over thousands of missiles to get the same hostages back and armed the Contras in violation of the law. Republicans stole the White House in 2000, perhaps as payback for the Democrats possibly stealing it in 1960. Against all national and international law, Bush made torture part of our foreign policy, brought us Abu Gharib and Guantanamo and introduced extraordinary rendition, arrest without trial, and assassination of American citizens all in violation of the law. The NSA engages in wholesale spying on Americans without warrant; the Koch brothers buy our elections; and ALEC writes the nations laws. Little remains of the citizen-legislator who does his/her duty and then goes home. Americans do all they can to avoid jury duty and barely vote.

Results

The result of this trifecta is the precipitous fall of the U.S. in global rankings. According to a recent happiness poll of 138 countries, the U.S. is number nineteen tied with Chile, Argentina and Sweden. The first five countries are all in South America. Paraguay is number one for the third year in a row. Factors included workplace, schools and a sense of community. American came very low on workplace happiness.

The U.S. is number seventy in health care performance. Our overall efficiency in all WHO member states is 37, just below Costa Rica and just above Slovenia. In comparisons to Canada, we are inferior in quality and access to health care.

Canada has a richer middle class and China has a lot more of them. Only our rich are the richest while the rest of us slide into third world status. The more we deregulate, the more the middle class loses. The more we cut taxes and shovel money to the rich, the more we strip the government of investment in the things every middle class needs like public education, libraries, communication systems and transportation.

Targeted groups fare no better. Discrimination against women in the news media has not improved since 1999 and regressed in some measures. The number of women in Parliament internationally increased in 2012 but only to 20.3% up from 19.5% in 2011. In 2013 the Global Gender Gap continues to be the least in the Nordic countries and the worst in North Africa and Middle East countries. The U.S. fell a spot from 22 to 23 though it increased its women in parliament indicator from 17% to 18% in 2013. But women are still virtually excluded from the skilled construction trades holding fewer than 3% of skilled trades jobs and fewer than 3% of skilled trades apprenticeships.

No U.S. city ranks among the most liveable in the world. But we are first in some things – we have the most prisoners per capita, the most adult onset diabetes and the most people who believe in angels. Perhaps they must because the devils are running the country. The destruction of the voting rights act by the Supreme Court in *Shelby* and the police behavior in Ferguson, MO takes us back to the 1960s in terms of civil rights. The attacks on contraception and the Supreme Court decision in *Hobby Lobby* takes us back to the 1970s in terms of women’s rights. The story that was “America” didn’t make it past half a century. That “empire” has already fallen. But as always it’s the innocent people who are feeling the pain as it smashes us on its way down.

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