

AUTHOR'S NOTE:

November 8, 2004 ... I have now changed my opinion on this matter and will update this essay in the near future.]

The Difference Between America and Americans

Lawrence Hagerty

Although this seems almost too obvious to point out, there are significant differences between the government of the United States, informally called “America,” and the people it purports to represent, “Americans.”

As individuals, Americans are generally well-liked, at least that is what most of them report after travelling to other countries. With the occasional exception of an obnoxious tourist or businessman, Americans do a good job of representing the values we hold dear. Yet it often seems that the leaders of our republic go to great lengths to contradict our most cherished beliefs, for example:

- Americans believe in democracy and the value of majority rule. Yet America props up tyrants the world over in its quest for cheap oil.
- Americans disdain violence and support the rule of law. Yet America refuses to accede to orders of the World Court or to follow U.N. resolutions it doesn't support.
- Americans believe in helping the weak and less advantaged. Yet America is now striking out like a terrified, blind giant against the hapless people of Afghanistan who have taken no part in attacking our shores.
- Americans want no holy war against Islam. Yet America has surely set its sights, intentionally or not, on provoking such a war. The leader of America is calling it “the first war of the 21st century.” Most thoughtful Americans hold that there should be no wars whatsoever in this century.

This list of differences between America and Americans grows longer with each passing day. Some say this is the reality of life, it has always been this way. Perhaps that is so, but if September 11th taught us anything at all, it has taught us that we must change the way we think if we are to survive as a nation. In particular, we must change the way we think about the state-sponsored violence that is called war. In recent weeks, the American soul has been hijacked by America's leaders into believing that launching million dollar missiles at ten dollar tents is an intelligent move. Before the murderous criminal attacks of September 11th, America boasted of its elite Special Forces and highly trained Seal teams. Why were they not sent to capture the criminals who massacred thousands of innocents on September 11th? Why instead does America insist on sacrificing thousands, perhaps even millions, of innocent lives through full-scale war and the mass starvation that is surely to follow? What is wrong with America, and why are Americans going along with the misguided policies of its rulers?

Even school children realize that for every bin Laden we kill a hundred more will spring up in his place. Terrorism will never be eliminated by more terror. Children in the United States are now living with the terror of possibly contracting a deadly disease, and children in Afghanistan live with the terror brought about when the ground shakes as a stray bomb falls on a nearby Red Cross food warehouse. If our species has any hope at all of surviving, we must bring an end to these ongoing cycles of violence. And we must do so very soon!

There are solutions to the complex problems we have created, but these solutions will require both hard work and personal sacrifice on the part of all Americans. Some of these sacrifices must come in changing the way we live our lives at the expense of the less fortunate. Undoubtedly, Americans enjoy lives enhanced by inexpensive gasoline, shoes, and clothing. But these items are inexpensive only because we are paying significantly less for them than their true cost. What is not being added to the prices we pay is a fair wage for a worker's labor and the cost of repairing the environmental damage caused by unsustainable production methods. Who cannot understand the anger of a Muslim in Indonesia who labors for only one dollar a day, sometimes being forced to work a 36 hour shift, making shoes and clothing for well-to-do Americans? You would be resentful yourself if placed in that situation. If we are to live up to the standards of fairness and justice in which we believe, we must find better ways to distribute the wealth that is now concentrated in the hands of so few. America, thus far, has not been willing to work on this problem. Only time will tell whether or not Americans have the courage to make the changes in their life-styles that must obviously be made if we are to build a better world.

The most important task for Americans at this moment, however, is to regain control of America before it completely engulfs the world in war. Although Americans firmly believe in the theory of democracy, the majority of us no longer care enough about our country to even cast a vote. In the last U.S. presidential elections, less than one-half of the eligible voters participated. And of those who did vote, less than half of them voted in favor of the men who are in power today. Yet the fact of the situation is that the main characters who are leading us into an open-ended, world-wide war are the same ones who organized the Gulf War. The Bush family, of course, is now represented by a son, but Cheney and Powell are still there. It has been ten years since America began its war on the Middle East, and today the same men are still calling the shots.

The work all Americans must now undertake is to quickly restore democracy to America, for a moment of truth is bearing down upon this nation like an out of control freight train. I am speaking of the national elections in 2002 and 2004. Out of the entire U.S. Congress there was only a single dissenting vote cast against our unilateral attack on Afghanistan. Only one person in over five hundred, Representative Barbara Lee of California, had the courage to call for an end to the cycles of violence that threaten to destroy much of civilization. She is the only person we should vote to return to the next Congress.

If Americans are to have any hope of regaining control of America, we must begin with a clean slate in Washington. The time to organize is now. All of the incumbents but one should be voted out of office, for they have surrendered their responsibilities to a ruling clique that does not faithfully represent the majority of Americans. We should send a loud and clear message to the world that this warlike persona of America is not our true nature. And we can do this by seeing to it that the men and women now holding positions of power in Washington are removed from office by an overwhelming majority of the popular vote. There is no doubt that such a move would cause a momentous realigning of the policies of America with the will of the American people. Let us begin our work today, for there is no time left to waste.

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