

December 28, 2015

HISTORY MAY NOT REPEAT ITSELF, BUT IT CERTAINLY DOES RHYME

In a lengthy 1852 essay entitled [The 18th Brumaire of Louis Napoleon](#), Karl Marx famously wrote that "*History repeats itself, first as tragedy, second as farce.*" (In reality,



Marx cribbed the comment from his future writing partner Friedrich Engels, who noted a year earlier that " . . . everything [is] re-enacted twice over, once as grand tragedy and the second time as rotten farce." Yes, yes, I know: by quoting both Marx and Engels in a single paragraph, at least one of you is going to call me a Communist . . . or Socialist. Truth to tell, I've been called worse, and as Grandpa Doc stated on innumerable occasions, "I don't care what you call me, so long as it isn't late for supper . . ." While I'm not certain I agree with Messrs. Marx and Engels, I do know history does tend to move in cycles and that oftentimes, its lessons are ignored. As but one example, Napoleon's invasion of Russia (the "Patriotic War") in 1812 and Hitler's invasion of the Soviet Union ("Operation Barbarossa") in 1941. In both cases, the invading armies failed to achieve their objective, victims not of superior firepower but of the fierce Russian winter. Then there is Afghanistan, the "graveyard of empires," where the Brits never learned from the failure of the ancient Greeks, nor the Russians from the Brits, nor the Americans from the Soviets.

Afghanistan aside, the United States has likewise found itself time and again on the historic treadmill. Throughout our relatively brief history, whenever we've become confused by - and plagued with - unemployment, vast waves of newcomers, the gross economic disparity between "haves" and "have-nots," national timidity and rapid social change, we've fallen prey to the preachments of demagogues, the need to find and blame "bogeymen," and the acceptance of what in more pacific times would be

considered out-and-out extremism. And here we're thinking of the late 18th century anti-Masons, the "Know Nothing" anti-Catholics of the 1840s, the anti-Chinese of the 1850s, the anti-Eastern European socialists and anarchists of the early 20th century, the anti-Japanese of the 1940s and the anti-immigrant-of-all-kinds-but-especially-any-and-all-Muslims of today. It might not be "rotten farce," but it sure is repetitive, familiar and shameful.

In the 1840s, warned that the Vatican was going to take over America, Know Nothing acolytes elected members to congress and torched innumerable Catholic churches. Today, Tea Partiers warn and legislate against Muslims instituting *Sharia* law and torch mosques. In the early 20th century, laws to effectively shut out eastern Europeans from entering America were enacted. Today, nearly two-thirds of our governors have declared that they will not permit Muslims to move to their state. And most famously, Donald Trump has declared that if elected, he will close America's doors to any and all Muslims.

Dozens upon dozens of writers, journalists and political psychologists have attempted to understand and explain the allure of a Trump, a Cruz or a Carson; of how and why appeals to the worst sort of nativist bigotry and schoolyard bullying can find favor with a growing slice of the American public - a segment of that public which heretofore had little if anything to do with the political process. These writers, journalists and political psychologists have for the most part stated the obvious: that a growing swathe of American society is both angry and untrusting, fearful and seeking simple one-syllable solutions to complex polysyllabic challenges. Where once people wanted leaders who were refined, well-educated and capable of delivering a message of hope, today many seek leaders who are as common, coarse and anti-intellectual as Archie Bunker and are quick to push that button labeled "FEAR."

Angry fearful Americans seek to be told precisely who's responsible for today being so unlike yesterday, and don't particularly care if the answer is "the gays," "Mexican immigrants," "Muslim terrorists," or "Hollywood immoralists." This is the group that Trump, Carson, Cruz and Christie appeal to. But it is likely that they do not constitute a large enough - or committed enough - piece of the voting pie to make any of them our next president. For none of them - and this includes Florida Senator Marco Rubio - can win the estimated 40% of America's Hispanic vote it will take to win in November . . . let alone African Americans, women, the highly educated or gays.

Among those currently seeking the Republican nomination for president, one claims that the best way to defeat ISIS is to "carpet bomb them into oblivion." (Senator Cruz, the putative "Carpet-Bomber-in-Chief," who says we'll find out ". . . if sand can glow in the dark," does not appear to understand [what carpet bombing entails](#); it means bombing a defined area without discriminating between targets . . . which means thousands upon thousands of civilian fatalities. It is also effectively illegal under [the](#)

[Law of Armed Conflict](#)). Another, Mr. Trump wants to deport every illegal alien in America . . . along with building a 2,000-mile wall between the U.S. and Mexico. (Someone estimated that it would take nearly 100,000 busses to transport 11,000,000 illegals back to Mexico. Anybody got an idea how much 100,000 busses cost? Maybe Trump will pay for them out of his own pocket . . .) Then there's Ohio Governor John Kasich who has staked himself to "punching Russian President Vladimir



Putin in the nose," and New Jersey Governor Chris Christie who told a national television audience that not only would he set up a no-fly zone over Syria; he would shoot down Russian warplanes that violated that zone.

Such bellicosity and bumptious bullying is reminiscent of the late Wisconsin Senator Joseph "Tail Gunner Joe" McCarthy.

I am purposefully *not* adding the names Clinton or Sanders to the list of those who have failed to learn the lessons of history . . . and not at all because of political partisanship. Secretary Clinton is, when all is said and done, a fairly typical moderate-slightly-left Democrat of the old school, while Senator Sanders, if listened to, has been expressing the same anger, frustration and distrust as much of the above-referenced segment of the American public. But neither of them have pushed the old FEAR button. In the case of Senator Sanders, his mistrust is reserved far more for corporatists than Muslims; his anger is directed against the top one-tenth-of-one percent rather than immigrants, labor unions or Planned Parenthood. And apparently, despite the media's fascination with Trump, Carson, Cruz and the rest of the Republican field, more and more people are picking up on Senator Sanders' message: according to [The Hill's Brent Budowsky](#), the latest Quinnipiac poll, shows the Vermont senator destroying Republican candidate Donald Trump in a general election by 13 percentage points. According to Budowsky, *"In this new poll, Secretary Clinton would defeat Trump by 7 percentage points, which is itself impressive and would qualify as a landslide, while the Sanders lead of 13 points would bring a landslide of epic proportions. Sanders has 51 percent to Trump's 38 percent. If this margin held*

in a general election, Democrats would almost certainly regain control of the United States Senate and very possibly the House of Representatives."

And yet, even if these polling figures are reasonably accurate - and the Republicans do go down to ignominious defeat - America will still in a world of trouble. For even with an overwhelming Democratic victory there would still be one hell of a lot of people out there who continue believing with every fiber of their being that the nation is under attack both from within and without; that its leaders are traitorous conspirators who hate America; and that the federal government - a.k.a. "public enemy #1" - is a rapacious leviathan bent on devouring everyone's personal liberty. As nutty and off-base as these people are, they can continue wreaking havoc on a country desperately in need of hope, unity and a sense of common purpose. And perhaps worst of all, this [polycephalic](#) monster will no doubt contend with fiery breath that the election of 2016 was stolen by an entrenched left-wing cabal which swears eternal fealty not to God, but to Allah, not to Madison but to Marx, and not to heaven, but to hedonism. .

We began this essay quoting Karl Marx who had ripped off Friedrich Engels that "*History repeats itself, first as tragedy, second as farce.*" We conclude with a pearl from Mark Twain who wrote that "*History doesn't repeat itself, but it does rhyme.*" By this, I have to believe he meant that although history does not *literally* repeat itself - in the sense that exactly the same things happen over and over again - it does have recurring themes which we ignore at our own peril.

In other words, the past is prologue . . .

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