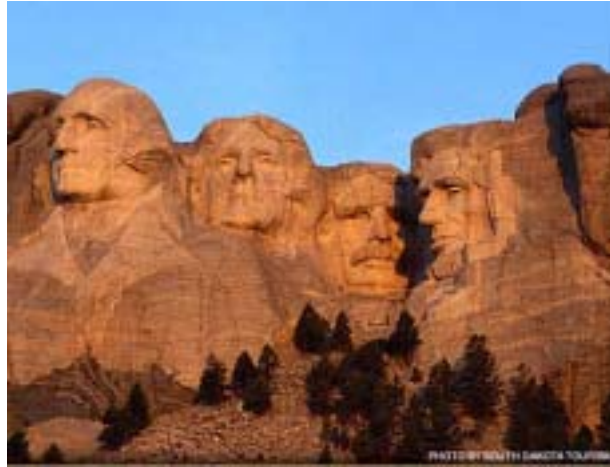


THE BRYCE IS RIGHT!

The ramblings of Palm Harbor writer Tim Bryce.

THE AMERICAN CHARACTER - 3/15/2010 - by Tim Bryce



When an American travels overseas he becomes an ambassador of our country, whether he is aware of it or not. This became apparent to me when I started visiting foreign clients. Just about everyone I have met overseas wants to know about American interests, the mood of the country, and our politics. In general, there is contempt for our government and genuine concern for the spirit and well-being of the American people. However, it strikes me the character of the country overall is undergoing a transformation. Years ago, if you were to ask people abroad to describe our country, you might hear something like, "*The land of opportunity*" or "*The land of the free and home of the brave*"; that we possess a pioneering spirit and "*can do*" mentality; that we are the land of plenty, the world's breadbasket, an economic engine, the chief exporter, a melting pot, and leaders of the free world. All of these descriptors are generally regarded as complimentary, something we are all rather proud of and yet the cause of envy and scorn to our detractors.

Consider some of our more inspirational icons for a moment. Do the presidential figures carved on Mt. Rushmore truly depict the current sense of our national strength, wisdom and vision? Does the Statue of Liberty embody our current policies of immigration and hope? Do we still enjoy the same freedoms and independence as represented by the Liberty Bell? Are we still as united as the American Flag is supposed to represent? Not by a long shot. Our character has quietly changed over the years.

Character is typically defined by such things as pride, integrity, honor, spirit and resolve. It is shaped by socioeconomic conditions, leadership, and management. Unfortunately, the 21st century is off to a bad start, plus we have elected lawyers to lead us and allowed the media to guide us, and when it comes to management, is anyone truly happy with the state of our government? It is no small wonder the character of the country has changed.

I think we all know deep-down we are an imperfect society and have our own unique set of problems. Regrettably, people, both internally and externally, no longer see America in the same light as before. Now we are characterized as greedy and self-centered. We are also recognized as the world's policeman, a burden we assumed following World War II, a position previously held by other civilizations, such as ancient Rome and Great Britain. In addition, America is regarded as the land of civil rights and political correctness. Unfortunately, we are perceived as the land of facade as opposed to substance. For example, we are now better known for the glamour and glitz of Hollywood as opposed to being captains of industry. Our credibility has been decimated by such things as the near collapse of our banking and auto industries, an eroding infrastructure, and our transportation systems which seem archaic when compared to their counterparts elsewhere in the world.

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More disturbing, America is now seen as a battleground for class warfare between the have's and have-not's, thereby being forced to make an ideological choice between socialism and capitalism. Consequently, the government suffers from polarization and gridlock due to political wrangling, and the demeanor of the citizens, in turn, grows impatient.

Finally, America is perceived as a Godless and immoral country being strangled by too many rights and laws. Do we really need to legislate everything? When we have to put labels on packs of hot dogs to warn people they might cause choking, maybe we have gone too far. I, for one, am tired of the dumbing down of America.

Perhaps the best adjective to describe America today is "enigma" -

- On the one hand, when havoc strikes in a foreign land, the first country they call on for help is America. Yet, the USA seems to have trouble accommodating the needs of its own citizens. It seems rather odd America can rebuild roads and bridges in Iraq and Haiti faster than within its own borders.
- When hostilities arise between countries, America is summoned to quell the problem either through diplomacy or military intervention. Regardless of the outcome though, we are criticized by the world community for either doing too little or too much. Our enemies understand with perfect clarity that we are restrained by our rights and laws and plays the game accordingly. Consequently, America has to always fight with one hand tied behind its back.
- Regardless of our politics, America is still the place people want to come to, not run away from. Interestingly, we allow people to abuse the system even if they enter the country illegally.

I am always encouraged when I listen to some of our younger people, particularly those in uniform who have been abroad, and understand how great America once was and could be again, but they are also aware of its frailties. They adamantly do not want to see it fail during their watch, yet are at a loss as to how to prevent it.

Years ago, Laurence M. Gould, the President Emeritus of Carleton College said in a commencement address, *"I do not believe the greatest threat to our future is from bombs or guided missiles. I don't think our civilization will die that way. I think it will die when we no longer care. Arnold Toynbee has pointed out that 19 of 21 civilizations have died from within and not from without. There were no bands playing and flags waving when these civilizations decayed. It happened slowly, in the quiet and the dark when no one was aware."*

America gives the impression of being as confused as a punch-drunk fighter staggering around the ring, bobbing and ducking at shadows, swinging at things that do not exist, tired and confused. It hardly looks like the fresh boxer who entered the ring over 200 years ago. It's either time for some smelling salts and attitude readjustment, or face the consequences.

I, for one, would like to believe we can do better.

Keep the Faith.

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