

CAN I HAVE MY COUNTRY BACK, PLEASE?

By Don Feder

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It's times like these that I miss my country most.

Holidays like Memorial Day, the Fourth of July and Thanksgiving remind me that once upon a time (long ago, in a galaxy far, far away), I had a country. It was called America.

Perfect? Absolutely not. Nothing is in this world. But it represented something noble, brave and fine. Even if they couldn't quite articulate it, Americans understood what America meant – and cherished it. Once, we knew our nation's history. Once we spoke a national language. Once we controlled our borders. Once we knew what treason was and how to deal with it.

But I'm getting ahead of myself.

Of our three national holidays, for me, Memorial Day is the most significant. The Fourth of July celebrates our independence. Harkening back to our beginnings, Thanksgiving recalls our religious roots. But it's the blood and guts (the suffering and sacrifice) symbolized by Memorial Day, that made America possible. To make ideals real – and to protect and preserve them -- requires payment in the coin of strife and death.

At the urging of my youngest son, I just finished watching the series "Band of Brothers," based on the Stephen Ambrose history of one company of the 506th Regiment of the 101st Airborne, from Normandy to the Eagle's Nest. It's a stirring saga – all the more intense because it's told without the usual Hollywood hoopla.

Each episode opens with commentary from the men whose story this is -- the veterans of Easy Company. Old men (most in their '80s) their faces are like a bomb-scarred landscape. There's an undercurrent of emotion in the quiet voices of men who went through hell so the rest of us have a safe, comfortable life as free men in a nation of free men.

If I could speak with them, I'd ask: "Are you happy with what your country has become? When you were a nervous kid waiting to jump out of a plane while shells peppered the sky, did you ever imagine it would come to this?"

Alienation – the sense of being severed from your roots. Waking up covered in bandages, in a hospital bed in a strange land (where no one understands a word you're saying) and wondering what happened to the world you once knew.

Doom and gloom, you say? You wouldn't if you were paying attention.

Less than 8 weeks ago, a brain-damaged woman was deliberately starved to death. (Her mother was not allowed to moisten her parched lips with drops of water.) A judge decided that hers was a life unworthy of life -- in the finest tradition of Nazi medicine.

In Lexington, Massachusetts – where Minutemen first confronted the tyranny represented by redcoats – the father of a kindergartener was arrested recently for objecting to the indoctrination of his child in the homosexual lifestyle. (He had refused to leave his son's elementary school until administrators agreed to respect his parental rights.) Nothing is allowed to stand in the way of teaching kids the swellness of sodomy.

In Nebraska, a federal judge overturned an amendment to the state constitution (enacted by over 70% of voters) recognizing the reality that a married couple is a man and a woman united in the bonds of matrimony – not two perverts playing house. Democracy and morality are dying together.

On a cable TV reality-based show, a fat loudmouth with a ponytail and his dwarf companion repeatedly used a four-letter word to refer to Mother Teresa, who devoted her life to succoring the sick and dying. This loathsome display of vulgarity and disrespect is one example of the evil that passes for entertainment in 21st century America.

Across the nation, pandering politicians rush to bestow benefits on illegal aliens – driver's licenses, in-state tuition at public colleges for their children, even workmen's compensation for injuries sustained at jobs they

shouldn't have. We've become a people of misplaced compassion who are driven to show love for home invaders.

In Massachusetts, Connecticut and elsewhere, bills advance to give addicts needles (supposedly to contain the spread of AIDS – a disease spawned by the Sexual Revolution). Thus have we gone from just-say-no, to just use a clean needle as you shoot junk into your arm and accelerate our evolution to Addict Nation. In California and a number of other Western states, physicians can prescribe pot – the drug that opens the gates to a life of addiction – for everything from the nausea accompanying chemotherapy to a bad back.

Sometime in its current term, the U.S. Supreme Court will decide if Americans will be allowed to have public displays of the Ten Commandments (as long as they're constitutionally camouflaged with secular documents). It's reached the point where this is a real big deal – permitting any public acknowledgement of the ethos on which America was founded. The 9th Circuit Appeals Court nearly succeeded in taking “one nation under God” out of the Pledge of Allegiance. (Its decision was overturned by the Supreme Court – on a technicality.) What then of John Adams admonition: “Our Constitution was made only for a moral and a *religious* people. It is wholly inadequate to the government of any other”?

And that's just an aerial overview of a nation in spiritual free-fall.

If you approve of the above, read no further. You are hopeless, and deserve the fate which awaits you. On the other hand, if you hate what we've become in the past four decades, let me show you the not-so-distant past.

Let me tell you what my America was like. For those of you under 40, it may come as a revelation.

- In my America, there was prayer in the schools, crèches in public parks at Christmas (in fact, sales people actually wished you a “Merry Christmas,” instead of the generic, secularized “happy holiday”), and universal respect for individuals who were reverently referred to as “men of the cloth.” Hollywood celebrated faith with classics like “The Song of Bernadette,” “Going My

Way,” “The Ten Commandments” and “Heaven Knows, Mr. Allison.”

- Instead of half-naked, writhing celebrities and smirking savages with pistols larger than their brains, we had athletes, warriors, champions of justice and people of faith as heroes. (In terms of role models, we’ve gone from Audie Murphy to Edie Murphy.)
- It was universally acknowledged that sex should be reserved for marriage. Those who lived together without the benefit of a marriage license weren’t called a “cohabitating couple.” It was said they were “shacking up” or “fornicating.” The product of their “illicit” relationships weren’t “born out-of-wedlock;” they were bastards (a judgment on the parents, not the children).
- Pornography was limited to the shadow world – to paperbacks and magazines surreptitiously sold under the counter, or arriving in the mail in a plain-brown wrapper. Parents could be assured that children wouldn’t encounter sex before the appropriate time. Society treated this volatile aspect of human nature cautiously and respectfully, not as a lurid national pastime that pervades every aspect of our lives. Virginity and fidelity were prized. Indiscretion, promiscuity and adultery were condemned.
- Addiction too was limited to society’s fringes, to social outcasts. Provisions were made for the treatment – or incarceration – of the unfortunates who became slaves to narcotics. But we didn’t cater to them by facilitating their addiction, in the name of disease control or compassion.
- Immigrants (who were here legally) were humbly grateful to reside in the greatest nation on earth. They understood that it was their responsibility to learn our language and history and identify with us – in short to Americanize. Instead of making demands, they accepted obligations.
- In general, our society was more oriented toward responsibilities than rights. The mark of an American wasn’t a hand outstretched, palm up, but a shoulder for bearing burdens. Instead of whiny demands, we gratefully accepted duties.
- Crime was an anomaly. In small towns, people frequently went away for the weekend without locking their doors. Except for certain disreputable sections, the streets of our cities were safe for women, even at night. Girls weren’t abducted, raped and buried alive in landfills. The rights of the accused were minimal.

- Expressions like “no-fault divorce,” “casual sex,” “recreational drugs,” “undocumented workers,” “same-sex couples,” “trophy wives,” “gender-neutral,” “racial profiling,” “affirmative action,” “church-state separation,” “victimless crimes,” “sex-industry workers,” “symbolic speech,” “sexually transmitted diseases,” “non-judgmentalism,” and “revisionist history” were blessedly unknown.
- Homosexuality was treated as a grievous sin – or a mental disorder (depending on your perspective) – not as an innate characteristic conferring minority status. Before they became “gay,” homosexuals weren’t hated; they were pitied. But they weren’t allowed to turn the social order upside down to enhance their self-esteem.
- The FBI. Boy Scouts, police, firemen, military and clergy were respected. Degenerates, parasites, misfits, mutants and whiners were not.
- Americans knew their history, celebrated their past and revered their heroes. They weren’t consumed with guilt for the mistakes of the past. Everyone knew that slavery was a great wrong and the Indians got a raw deal. We also knew that slavery was a universal institution and we weren’t the first people to clash with an indigenous population. We understood that America’s faults were minor and – on balance – the blessings we bestowed on humanity far outweighed our mistakes.
- We weren’t obsessed with our image abroad – whether foreigners loved us. We were willing to accept the animosity of the envious and the hatred of our enemies as part of the natural order. When the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor, we didn’t ask if we had brought this on ourselves by our ghastly treatment of a nation of ruthless warmongers. FDR didn’t proclaim that our mission was to bring democracy to the Germans and Japanese (that was a side effect). It was to kill Japanese and Germans and to keep killing them until they stopped killing Chinese and Filipinos, and Jews and Poles and went back where they belonged. The idea of Americans agonizing over whether *Mein Kampf* was treated disrespectfully in a POW camp for Germans is ludicrous.
- We weren’t “multi-cultural.” There was one culture – Anglo-Saxon, Protestant – to which others were expected to conform. This didn’t mean that Jews, Catholics, blacks or Asians, considered

themselves less American than those of Mayflower descent. But it was universally acknowledged that America was founded on the heritage of Western civilization, as amplified and transmitted by England.

My America worked. We saved civilization from repeated barbarian onslaughts. We were the arsenal of democracy – the workshop of the world. Our prosperity lifted boats across the globe. We were happy, self-confident and proud.

And look at us now. We're like a dysfunctional family of 268 million, bordered by two oceans.

Our salvation/resurrection lies in memory.

In a novel of the end of the Roman Empire (“The Last Legion” by Valerio Manfredi), the boy emperor Romulus Augustus and his tutor are about to escape their barbarian captors. The elderly mentor stops to take a copy of the “Aeneid” (Virgil’s epic poem of the founding of Rome).

“That’s useless weight,’ protested Romulus.”

“On the contrary, it is the most precious thing I have in here, my son,’ replied Ambrosinus. ‘When we flee and leave everything behind us, the only resource that we can take with us is memory. The memory of our origins, of our roots, the stories of our ancestors. Only memory can allow us to be reborn. It doesn’t matter where, it doesn’t matter when. If we conserve the memory of our past greatness and the reasons we’ve lost it, we will rise again.’”

No one will give us back our country. We have to take it back – with our memory, our discernment, our capacity for struggle and sacrifice and our sheer will.

These are thoughts to ponder while you’re waiting to jump out of a plane onto the battlefield of the culture war.

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