

The American Crisis, Part Four

America's Race to Self-Destruction: Is there a way back from the brink?

by Kevin Annett



The Mayflower Compact, 1620

A nation without a sovereign, save the people themselves! Our bold American experiment has provoked the hatred and wicked design of tyrants and monarchs everywhere. Yet for all that, it is not a foreign enemy that will destroy our Republic, but only we ourselves.

- Thomas Paine, Valley Forge, Pennsylvania, Christmas 1777

I tremble for my country when I recall that God is just. - Thomas Jefferson, 1798

Rulers whose regimes are collapsing make increasingly self-destructive decisions, as if they are seeking their own demise. That was the belief of historian Barbara Tuchman in her book *The Proud Tower*, which surveys the doomed European monarchies on the eve of World War One.

Tuchman was an establishment scholar, so her study was restricted to the apparent “movers and shakers” of society. And while it’s undeniable that in declining nations, insanity tends to be concentrated at the pinnacles of wealth and power, her point about suicidal pathology can apply to entire countries and their people whose clock is running down.

Just look at America.

The nation’s tepid experiment in human equality and self-governance is nearly ended. Perhaps it never stood a chance in the face of Big Money, militarism, global realpolitik, and what Alexis de Tocqueville called Americans’ dual, conflicting impulse towards both liberty and slavery. So while America’s chaos is not unlike the waning days of any great power, its collapse is tragically poignant for humanity and anyone who believes in a free Republic of citizens without masters.

The United States is a weary nation. Behind the mask of fervent “Blue” or “Red” partisanship lies a moral and spiritual exhaustion. It is small wonder that both presidential candidates are old men pretending they are not, as they mirror and personify the tired national psyche. The dying are rarely honest with themselves about their condition, and while most people have to be at some point, politicians cannot afford to be during an election year. And so, America’s *Danse Macabre* continues.

It is a particularly violent, rage-filled dance, as the neo-fascist hordes around Donald Trump routinely demonstrate, like a dissociated man repeatedly stabbing himself. The visceral madness being stoked and dredged up by Trumpism’s cult of hatred is becoming bigger than its parts and is morphing into a fury that seems unstoppable and uncontrollable.

“It is not something that can be understood,” an aged German woman once told me, when I asked her to explain Hitlerism. “When a people choose to destroy themselves, there is no sane reason for it, and no way to halt it.”

If we look beyond the miasma of party politics, we see that Donald Trump is merely a more extreme manifestation of the spiritual rot and despair that has engulfed America. And yet, like a replay of Weimar Germany in the early 1930’s, many Americans, especially those at the “top”, are remarkably obtuse and in denial about their situation.

One of Fascism’s memorable critics and victims, Antonio Gramsci, wrote from prison in 1934, *“Denial is the most tenacious quality of the human mind. History teaches, but it has no pupils.”*

Americans generally don’t appreciate history or consider it too important, which puts them at an amnesiac disadvantage when dealing with other nations. *Who we are is who we were*, said America’s philosophical founder, the Frenchman Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Americans need to understand the roots of their present crisis to navigate their way through it.

The past half century has seen America’s share of the world’s productive wealth fall from over 40% to barely 13% today. That collapse has been even quicker and more dramatic than the comparable decline of the far bigger world empires of Britain and Rome. And yet the blithe call to *“Make America Great Again”* denies this reality by imagining a fairy-tale return to a time that is gone forever. This self-destructive delusion feeds a bloated military budget and national debt, impoverishing growing numbers of Americans and stoking the fires of domestic conflict. All of that strengthens the Chinese superpower at America’s expense, as is it is meant to.

None of these hard facts are entering into what passes as mainstream political discourse in America today. Diverted by their proxy war in the Ukraine and embroilment in the Chinese-sponsored turmoil in Gaza, Americans are unable to resolve the contrived civil war at home; not for the obvious reasons but because of something more basic.

They have forgotten who they are.

Recalling Rousseau's words, it is time to recall the source that birthed the American Republic if the nation is to recover its soul and pull back from the brink.

Remembering and Recovering a Covenant

As a young boy, whenever I crossed the border to visit my American cousins, I felt a sense of freedom that was absent in Canada. Something in the air was different. As similar as our two cultures were, they seemed rooted in different soil. Later, I learned why.

When a handful of Puritans signed the Mayflower Compact in 1620 on Massachusetts' shores, they were doing something no people had ever done before: establishing their own sovereign government and Constitution according to their free will and consent. But equally significant, their self-governance was understood and enshrined as a new, permanent, and mutually binding covenant between themselves and God, who was their ultimate authority.

That covenant was the seed from which America sprouted. The sovereign was not a king or a pope or any authority, but the people themselves, under God alone.

This new and revolutionary self-governance was infused with a sacred obligation by the people to hold fast to their covenant with God or face destruction. America would endure and remain vital if the nation stayed true to its covenant with God's law. That law said that all people are not only created equal and free but remain so, not subject to worldly rulers who usurp God's supremacy. If the nation rejected that covenant and law, it would come to ruin.

Who can deny that America has violated and abrogated its founding covenant? Who can deny that Americans have gone whoring after the false gods and unrighteous mammon of this world: of greed, decadence, corporate idolatry, and militarism? The nation's collapse into domestic strife is a symptom and result of this inner, spiritual downfall and enslavement.

For Americans who still believe in their founding covenant, they must accept that their nation is suffering the consequence of having rejected it. In fact, a particularly harsh judgement lies upon America today because it was set apart by Providence and history as a model for humanity, and then it betrayed its purpose, including through the evils of slavery, genocide, foreign wars and conquests, and the exploitation and oppression of the many by the few. God's judgement against America's betrayal of itself is playing out now as the country tears itself and its Constitution apart with an apparent massive death wish.

And yet, behind every suicidal impulse is the desire to be free, like an appeal for redemption. Such a cry was emblazoned on the first flag of the American Revolution that flew at Bunker Hill: "*Appeal to Heaven*". At the core of the American soul is this certainty that its fate lies in God's hands according to God's law, which is the nation's only protection in the face of its own institutionalized evil and corruption. So today, when its liberty is threatened with extinction, America must remember God's promise and call to become the body politic made from God's own nature of equality, justice, and liberty for all: not as jingoistic slogans but living realities.

In an earlier letter to America, I urged citizens in their communities to join hands across party allegiances and re-establish the Republic through their own local courts and Assemblies: not as Democrats or Republicans, but as Americans. That natural inclination of good will and grassroots patriotism is beginning to spread across the country. But this revolutionary recovery can only continue and succeed through men and women with virtuous hearts whose love of liberty as one people under God overcomes all factional division and hatred.

As in the first American Revolution, the present crises and uncertainty are a sign of a new birth, as Americans are summoned to recover themselves and their original covenant. And yet no-one willingly leaves Babylon after being ensconced in its abominations. They must be violently expelled from it and rediscover who they are in the wilderness.

So too must Americans be prepared to lose all their comfortable fetters and loyalties in order to recover their soul: not tomorrow, but today, as Thomas Paine declared on the eve of the Revolution in 1775: *“If there is to be trouble, let it be in our time, so that our children may know peace.”*

Now is not the time to shore up the tottering inner and outer edifices that are meant to fall. This is the moment to leave the fallen city of Corporate America and search once more, like our ancestors, for that sweet land of liberty where heaven and earth are one.

Consecrated to that purpose, it is time for us to make America again.

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This article is the fourth in a series entitled *The American Crisis*, written in the spirit of its namesake by Thomas Paine to revive the hearts and sharpen the minds of a struggling people.



