

OUR NATION'S POLITICAL CRISIS: HOW WE GOT INTO IT – AND HOW TO GET OUT

by Glen Anderson

Thoughtful people know that the U.S. is facing one of the most serious political crises in our nation's history. A narcissistic, grossly ignorant, and psychologically unstable huckster has gained enormous political power. People worldwide are worrying how to get out of this mess. By February 20, 2017, the Olympia Fellowship of Reconciliation will post a much more thorough version of this article onto the "Nonviolence" part of www.olympiafor.org. That article will answer three questions:

(1) How did we get into this mess? (2) What's going on? (3) How do we get out of this mess?

The article you are reading now only summarizes briefly some answers to questions (1) and (3). The longer version of this article will develop those topics more thoroughly. Question (1) of that longer article will provide more information and examples. Question (3) will offer many additional insights to help us strategize and organize savvy nonviolent remedies to help us get out of our current political crisis.

(1) UNDERLYING PROBLEMS AND A CONFLUENCE OF TRENDS LED TO THIS CRISIS:

Trump himself is not the problem. He is a symptom of underlying problems and systems that have been getting worse for a long time. For decades the U.S. has suffered from underlying problems including racism, sexism, anti-gay bias, anti-immigrant bias, ignorance of foreign policy, American Exceptionalism, big business's greed and corruption, economic inequality between a few extremely rich persons and everyone else, and mainstream media's simplistic reporting.

In order to stop the Trumpism that has captured the U.S. government, we must recognize the underlying systemic problems that have resulted in this blatant symptom. We must identify, resist and roll back those systemic problems that led to this crisis. Demonizing one person distracts us from addressing the serious underlying problems and symptoms that allowed Trumpism to dominate the federal government.

The longer article that we'll post to the "Nonviolence" part of www.olympiafor.org by February 20, 2017, will provide information and insights about these topics:

- **Economics**
- **Loss, fear, and anger**
- **Despite having the world's biggest, most violent military, Americans still feel afraid in the world**
- **Corporate-owned news media and the dumbing-down of America**
- **Two big, corrupt dysfunctional political parties**
- **Trumpism hastens the end of U.S. Empire and selfishness: "Pride goes before destruction." (Proverbs 16:18)**

(2) ACKNOWLEDGE THAT THE NATION AND U.S. EMPIRE WE HAVE KNOWN WERE NOT SUSTAINABLE:

For decades the U.S. Empire has been overreaching and has not been sustainable. We must help the American people understand this and change toward more humane ways to interact with the world.

Despite U.S. violence against other nations, we can no longer compel other nations' obedience. The last war we won was World War II more than 70 years ago. Korea ended in a stalemate truce but no legal end to the war. We lost the Vietnam War, and we have been losing other wars since then. The era of colonialism is long past. After the Cold War, other nations have stopped tolerating "the only remaining superpower."

Trump's "America First" rhetoric reflects his own narcissism and panders to the U.S.'s narcissism and American Exceptionalism. A psychologically healthy and mature person – or nation – works to get along cooperatively and harmoniously with other persons and nations, not to demand being first. For example, I should not demand a "Glen Anderson First" policy that lets me crowd in front of the checkout line at the grocery store. An "America First" policy is neither fair nor sustainable nor realistic in a world with nearly 200 other nations. Narcissism is bad public policy.

The climate "deniers" are denying science and denying reality. They are refusing to acknowledge the hard truth that we and our giant business corporations are using natural resources at an un-

sustainable rate. When people deny hard realities, they are preventing themselves from planning how to solve problems, so they are setting themselves up for catastrophic failures. This refusal to accept reality means that the U.S. is refusing to solve real-world problems.

The rest of the world does appreciate science, but the U.S. has become a “denier” nation regarding climate and science itself. Denying climate science – just like denying human rights for women, Muslims, LGBT people – is preventing our nation from moving ahead to a better future. Rather than “making America great again,” this anti-science bias will do the opposite. It will make us a backward nation that will allow problems to get worse and will let other nations move ahead of us, making America weak, not “great.”

The “Loss, Fear and Anger” section listed in Part (1) above pertains to our nation’s declining standard of living along with other trends. Already, we are far down the list of indicators of quality of life (life expectancy, access to affordable health care, etc.). Michael Moore’s clever film “Where to Invade Next” makes some interesting points and comparisons.

Perhaps Elisabeth Kubler-Ross’s insights into 5 stages of dying could help our nation cope with the loss of U.S. Empire and nationalistic egocentrism.

Someone new to Alcoholics Anonymous is told that the first step toward recovery is to acknowledge the hard reality that the person is addicted to alcohol. Likewise, the first step for Americans to start healing our nation is to acknowledge that the U.S.’s economic system, empire, and militarism are not sustainable. They never were sustainable. No amount of bullying and lying can change this hard reality.

Trump’s extremism will hasten the end of U.S. Empire. America’s smug nationalism is doomed. Americans need to acknowledge and internalize the truth of Proverbs 16:18: “Pride goes before destruction – and a haughty spirit before a fall.”

We need a fresh consciousness and modesty to actually let go of our overuse of natural resources, our abuse of climate, our worldwide militarism, etc. We must internalize that reality intellectually, emotionally, and in new public policy. Only then will we be truly free to explore fresh visions for the future instead of trying to hold on to the unsustainable past.

(3) VALUES AND STRATEGIES CAN HELP US ORGANIZE RESISTANCE AND REMEDIES:

A confluence of trends led us to this current crisis. Better values and smart strategies can get us out. Ordinary Americans can help our nation get through these hard times – and create decent solutions – if we:

- **Recognize that we must and can indeed address the problems effectively;** and
- **Understand how nonviolent grassroots movements are powerful ways to achieve social and political progress;** and
- **Work strategically and nonviolently** with other people to accomplish our goals.

Instead of merely being reactive, let’s get grounded – and help other people get grounded – in our best values, so we can move forward. Also, instead of getting trapped in partisanship and elections, let’s organize around the real issues.

The article we’ll post to the “Nonviolence” part of www.olympiafor.org by February 20, 2017, will flesh out the following ideas and additional ones:

Instead of Piling on More “Ain’t-It-Awful” Laments, Let’s Understand and Organize: Clearly, the 2016 election results portend extremely serious dangers for human rights, social and economic justice, the environment and climate, escalating militarism, and governmental corruption. We are in for hard times. When disaster strikes, a normal human reaction is to lament the horrible event. After the 2016 election, people are piling on a lot of “ain’t-it-awful” lamenting and reinforcing each other’s worst fears about what awaits us. That reaction is understandable, but it can crush our human spirit. Instead of letting dread overwhelm and immobilize us, we need to think clearly and devise smart strategies for solving the problems.

Some of Trump’s Likely Actions Were Already Happening under Obama. Therefore, We Must Change the Entrenched Bi-Partisan Systems that Caused These Problems: Our society is trapped in a status quo with polarized partisanship that interferes with understanding the problems and

solving them. Both of the big political parties are corrupt and dysfunctional. Such bipolar partisanship is part of the problem. Democrats who criticize Republican presidents give a “free pass” when Democratic presidents do the same things. (For example, Obama appointed many corporate big shots to major Executive Branch positions, and he deported more immigrants than any other president in U.S. history. See more examples in this article’s longer version.) To move forward, we must stop letting big business and the military-industrial complex dominate public policy altogether – not only when Republicans do it. Indeed, we must stop letting partisanship distract us from the real issues. The problems are not so much partisan, but really more systemic with top-down wealth and power preventing bottom-up democracy!

Focus on Systems, Not Just Individual Politicians or Political Parties: The big problems we face are not just individual politicians or individual political parties. Really, the problems are in big systems and institutions that are beholden to money and abuses of power. These big systems and institutions are long-

standing and entrenched. So if we want to solve the underlying problems, we need to examine those systems and institutions and devise nonviolent strategies to fix or replace them. It is possible to (1) start making progress at local levels; and then (2) share news of our local successes; and then (3) use this growing momentum to leverage progress at larger levels until we (4) win significant goals nationwide and worldwide.

Progress Comes Only from Grassroots Movements, Not as Gifts from the Top Down: All of the political and social progress the U.S. and other nations have achieved have resulted from movements organized at the grassroots, not as gifts from the top down. The grassroots-based Civil Rights Movement became a very significant part of U.S. history and culture. It was the Civil Rights Movement's grassroots organizing that convinced Congress to pass major civil rights laws in 1964 and 1965. The grassroots Civil Rights Movement also provided strong ripple effects for other emerging movements. It provided significant inspiration, insight, empowerment, skills, and volunteers for other strong grassroots movements such as the peace movement, the women's rights movement, and the environmental movement. Movements build from each other and learn from each other. This is explained very clearly in the 2016 book *This Is an Uprising* by Mark Engler and Paul Engler. (Also see their website, www.thisisanuprising.org)

Democracy Is 5% Voting and 95% Grassroots Organizing: Although people assume that voting is the heart of democracy, actually voting is only about 5% of democracy, while 95% of democracy is community organizing and getting together to build grassroots movements. We must awaken the general public about the issues, inform people, devise ways to empower people to take nonviolent actions, and then persuade the powerholders to do what we want. All of this requires that we be nonviolent and credible, and that we create safe opportunities for people to join with us. Nonviolent grassroots organizing is a different way to build power – and it is more powerful and effective than the heavy-handed kinds of power we commonly see. Indeed, nonviolence is a radical, creative alternative to merely “fight or flight,” which we have been taught are our only two options. Nonviolence gives us a better – and more powerful – alternative!

Withdraw Consent from Illegitimate and Abusive Authorities: Thomas Jefferson recognized that “we the people” create the government – and “we the people” can change or even replace the government. Likewise, Gene Sharp's research shows that powerful oppressors lose their power when people withdraw their consent and refuse to obey them. Therefore, an important part of Gene Sharp's advice is to figure out how people can withdraw their consent from oppressors, nonviolently resist, and build alternative movements to supplant the oppressive systems. The American people worry now about increasing oppression, social and economic injustice, environmental abuse, and political corruption. To protect ourselves from these problems, let's

look for ways to withdraw our consent from oppressors in government – and also in the economic sector and in other parts of our society – to weaken oppressors' power. We can use Gene Sharp's ideas to de-legitimize and weaken all of the oppressive systems. See resources at www.aeinstein.org

Why and How Our Organizing Must Take the Moral High Ground and Be Scrupulously Nonviolent: The right-wing forces of repression won votes by making people feel afraid. If protesters against Trump use violence – or even tactics that can be misunderstood or misrepresented as violent – they feed into the very same fear that elected the right wing forces of repression. They will frighten the public into wanting to militarize the police, increase surveillance of dissidents, violate our First Amendment rights to speech and assembly, and add to further polarization and repression. In order for us to win, we must be scrupulously nonviolent. Oppressors send agent provocateurs to infiltrate movements and provoke violence, because oppressors know that violence turns the general against the progressive movements. In order to protect our progressive movements, we must make sure we are scrupulously nonviolent.

Strategically Smart Nonviolent Grassroots Organizing Is Very Powerful! Nonviolence is not weakness. It's a different kind of strength. Decades ago, the very savvy nonviolent activist David Dellinger wrote a book about this titled, *More Power Than We Know*. Gene Sharp, the world's best researcher on the power of nonviolence and how to use nonviolence to remove dictators from power, said, “Dictators are never as strong as they tell you they are. People are never as weak as they think they are.” See resources and information at his non-profit organization www.aeinstein.org

The American People Are Not Stupid. They Are Simply Denied the Information and Empowerment They Need: Ordinary people do have good values, but don't know how to act on them. During the Olympia FOR's twice-weekly peace vigils, many people respond warmly and enthusiastically to our signs that convey positive, progressive values, such as “All people are one human family,” “Human rights are for everyone,” and “We all share one earth.” (See www.olympiafor.org/vigils.htm)

Instead of cynical “politics as usual,” let's try assuming that all people are basically good, and all people are seeking what they see as best. If we assume that each stranger we meet is a person of good will, this would open up space for a better interaction, and the other person would notice our positive vibe. We might bring yet another person into our progressive movements and make more progress toward an effective majority to solve our nation's problems.

Resources: Amazing numbers of high quality practical resources are available! Listed below are just a few of the many resources that can help us move ahead. I invite you to use these resources and share them with the other people and non-profit organizations with whom you work:

- A first step in dealing with our new crisis is to really understand (and not get stuck simply fearing and blaming). The Olympia Fellowship of Reconciliation's **December 2016** TV program, "**Healing from Political Blame, Shame, and Trauma,**" offers help in understanding – and healing from – the traumatic 2016 election season so we can move ahead humanely and effectively. You can watch it – and read a thorough summary in Word format – at the "TV Programs" part of www.olympiafor.org
- To get informed, inspired and started toward nonviolent grassroots organizing, I highly recommend Olympia FOR's **January 2017** TV program, "**Nonviolent Grassroots Remedies for Our Current Crisis.**" It follows up from our December program with "where-do-we-go-from-here" insights and strategies. You can watch it – and read a thorough summary in Word format – at the "TV Programs" part of www.olympiafor.org
- Many resources posted at the "Nonviolence" part of www.olympiafor.org can help you understand nonviolence and use it effectively. I especially recommend those under the subheadings "What Is Nonviolence?" and "Understanding and Using Nonviolence" and "Using Nonviolence in the Real World."

Many non-profit organizations and their websites offer excellent information, insights, and resources. I especially recommend these:

- For decades I have been recommending the amazingly smart resources by Gene Sharp and others at The Albert Einstein Institution: www.aeinstein.org.
- Lutheran Peace Fellowship: Visit www.lutheranpeace.org. Click "Resources" link. Then click "Nonviolence" link.
- Nonviolence International: www.nonviolenceinternational.net
- International Center on Nonviolent Conflict: www.nonviolent-conflict.org
- Campaign Nonviolence: www.paceebene.org/programs/campaign-nonviolence

Many, many books and resources are excellent for this topic. Here are just a few:

- *Why Civil Resistance Works* by Erica Chenoweth and Maria J. Stephan (2011)

- *This is an Uprising* by Mark Engler and Paul Engler (2016) (Also see www.thisisanuprising.org)
- *Doing Democracy: The MAP Model for Organizing Social Movements* by Bill Moyer, JoAnn McAllister, Mary Lou Finley, and Steven Soifer
- *A Force More Powerful* by Peter Ackerman and Jack DuVall – and the DVD/VHS series
- Books by and about Mohandas Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr.
- Books and articles written by Michael Nagler and George Lakey

Closing Encouragement: In November 2016 the American voters vigorously rejected the status quo. But that does **not** mean that the voters really wanted the cruelty, repression, corruption, and environmental damage that are being imposed upon us.

Instead, I believe that most Americans actually have better values deep down, and they can be helped to understand and support better values and better public policy.

The problems and solutions are more profound than any major political party or candidate recognizes. I believe that most Americans want a future radically better than either of the big political parties has been offering.

So instead of letting dread overwhelm and immobilize us, we need to think clearly and devise smart nonviolent strategies for solving the problems and achieving humane and sustainable goals such as peace, human rights for everyone, an economy that is honest and fair for everyone, an environment that is healthy and sustainable, and a society that practices nonviolence and compassion.

To build this bold new future, we must organize strategically savvy nonviolent grassroots movements. Nonviolence is bigger and bolder in vision and in methodology than anything "politics-as-usual" can offer.

Now is the time for us to:

- **Ground ourselves in our best values.**
- **Study the theory and practical uses of nonviolence.**
- **Study how to build powerful nonviolent grassroots movements for social and political change.**
- **Inform and empower large numbers of ordinary people to come together into grassroots movements that will use strategic nonviolence to solve local and national problems.**

**EACH PERSON CAN DO SOMETHING!
TOGETHER WE CAN ACCOMPLISH MUCH!**

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