

LISTEN TO THE ALARMS!

Man once surrendering his reason, has no remaining guard against absurdities the most monstrous, and like a ship without rudder, is the sport of every wind.--Thomas Jefferson to James Smith, 1822.

The amazing events of recent days viewed in parallel to revisiting the summer months in 1787 when the Constitution of the United States was negotiated, brings one quickly to recognition that our "union" is breaking apart. And, alarmingly, we have not the leadership nor the human genius or capacities of those who met in Philadelphia during that hot summer.

The leadership of this nation is bankrupt: bent upon single-minded, power-driven agendas to be achieved by any means, at any person's or group's expense. What those agendas might coalesce into escapes the citizenry, which is largely consumed with "getting by" or "getting mine".

Each delegate to the Constitutional Convention traveled to Philadelphia in a carriage for days or weeks through challenging weather, on muddy roads full of potholes and danger. They arrived exhausted to a city known to be hot and infectious in the summer. These were men of disparate educational and social backgrounds and skill levels, representing 11 states (Rhode Island refused to attend and New Hampshire had no money to send delegates) that had been damaged or ruined to various degrees by the long war for independence. They came to Philadelphia at the behest of the leaders who had forged the sketchy governmental model that had barely held together through war and its immediate aftermath.

These leaders – from Washington to Adams to Jefferson to Madison (who would become our first four Presidents) - realized that the states were behaving in dangerous and self-interested ways, with no regard to one another. They understood that without fundamental changes to its governmental model, this fledgling nation had no chance of survival on either our continent or the world stage.

What is it about today's "scene" that triggers thoughts of that moment in history when just a few leaders "stepped up" to the task of solidifying the union before it scattered into many pieces? After all, if our President, his party and the corporate elite are to be believed, the United States is today a booming place and all is well for its citizens. Today, we accept as true that we have a firm grip on the social, economic and political life of a union that is now well into its 3rd century of life: it cannot come apart.

Back then, states were bankrupted by war and farms and trades were struggling to recover. The federal government consisted only of a small Army and a Congress that had no power to legislate life across the states. With commerce having been so drastically disrupted by the war, every state was looking for a way to survive and thrive. The states taxed one another's citizens and blocked inter-state commerce. Citizens themselves identified with their states and had very little notion of a "united states"; they held divergent views about slavery, education, women's and native rights, and other social matters.

Certainly, the challenge before the leaders in 1787 might have seemed insurmountable. They very easily could have come to Philadelphia, argued vehemently for a few months or a year or even more, and then simply given up because their differences were so deeply irreconcilable. They would have gone home to their farms, plantations, trades and legal practices; some states would have thrived and others would have been consumed by their neighbors. And who knows what the outcome might have been.

But, in fact, when the delegates were completely stalemated and could not agree on the model for state representation in the two houses of Congress, one man – Caleb Strong from Massachusetts – *stepped up*. He unexpectedly set aside his state's interests and changed his vote, smoothing the way for delegates from North Carolina to follow. It was this "Great Compromise" that facilitated the design of our government and the creation of the Constitution that still controversially guides the governance of our nation.

In our day, we are far more familiar with stalemate and irreconcilable differences than most American citizens would like to be. Through an electoral system in need of reform, we have chosen a head of state who would prefer to be, and has the heart and make-up of, a narcissistic king. He governs by division, ignorance, fear, targeting, and hate. He serves those who have difficulty accepting the realities of the diverse and fragile world that technology enables us to see and feel on a daily basis. He uses and manipulates his "base" in demagogical ways.

And he stands unchallenged by those in Congress who have consolidated power by virtue of an antiquated two-party system corrupted by ideological distortion and fueled by the supremacy of money and influence. In the theatre created by the 24-hour news cycle, our elected representatives perform daily but ignore the foundational principle of compromise. They seem rigidly incapable of "stepping up" for the sake of the nation. Where is our Caleb Strong? Where are the leaders with the internal strength to seek solutions through honest, face-to-face argument and concession?

Here is the Preamble to the Constitution, written and approved in 1787 through a process of argument and compromise: "We the People of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defence, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America."

It seems fair to say that the principles of justice, domestic tranquility, general welfare and, even, liberty itself envisioned by our founders are now deeply buried in the fertile soil of cowardice, untruth, money and tainted power.

LISTEN! The alarm bells are sounding but as yet stand ignored. STEP UP!!

The people -- the people -- are the rightful masters of both congresses, and courts -- not to overthrow the Constitution, but to overthrow the men who pervert it. – Abraham Lincoln, Notes for Speeches at Columbus and Cincinnati, September 16 and 17, 1859.

Natalie Ammarell
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