

Last of the Intrepid Americans

by Nelson Hultberg

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Tom Brokaw's mega best seller, *The Greatest Generation*, struck a powerful chord throughout our nation. The reason why is because we as Americans today sense that we have lost something very profound, something elemental and essential that shaped the grit of our forefathers in earlier times, something that we have let slip away through indolence and intellectual treason to the Founders' vision for our country.

Our instincts are quite correct. What we have lost, and what the early generations of the 20th century possessed, is that heroic sense of life born of a golden age forged from 19th century values that were handed down from stoic parents to stalwart sons and daughters throughout the 20's and 30's. What the members of the World War II generation possessed was that steel-willed belief in America as earth's Eldorado with a divine destiny. This is something that today's country club conservatives and Brat Pack liberals know absolutely nothing about.

The World War II generation grew up without the plethora of government crutches and psychological excuses that so enamor Keynesian welfare statist. It was raised on hard-scrabble dreams shaped from the staunch rectitude of a freedom we no longer revere. It produced the last of the intrepid Americans who marched off to war with undaunted élan and came home still willing to chase the rainbows of better days ahead, assured with nothing more than their own conviction and sturried with nothing to fall back upon but their own resoluteness.

Our younger generations of Americans are no doubt more than willing to fight heroically for their country when the war is just, but it is depressingly clear that they are no longer willing to live on the strengths of their own merits in peacetime. What the WW II generation had was old fashioned "sovereignty of being," a concept totally alien to baby boomers who came of age in the mass hippie paroxysm of the 60's and its subsequent evolution into Nanny State liberalism.

In light of society's harrowing addiction to government dependency these days, it's hard to believe that we used to be a nation in which a man was expected to take responsibility for himself. Back in the good ol' days, we were certainly supposed to be concerned with our neighbor, but espousing all this "welfare rights" malarkey would have gotten one nothing but raucous contempt. I realize that such a way of life was a while back, and the young enthusiasts of today's computer cool world don't much truck with the logic of rugged individualism anymore. But nevertheless, there was a time in America when men were stalwart and disciplined instead of whiney and slothful. This fact is not inconsequential when trying to decipher the roots of society's present plight.

The youth of today could find no finer model of values and mores to emulate than the era in which the last of the intrepid Americans came of age -- the years from 1930 to 1950. I was but a small child in the forties and fifties, so I can only portray the era's virtues second hand, culling them from the memories of family and neighbors who preceded me. But there were enough glistening residues from the pre-war and post-war years that lingered through the fifties to give one both an emotional and cerebral feel for the age.

What kind of time was it? Though hobbled in the 30's by the government induced Great Depression, which produced the seeds of today's Leviathan via the economic moonshine of FDR and the abandonment of gold as money. America was still basically a free and robust land that, at least in spirit and philosophical vision, was healthy. The values of her citizens were still of the Old Republic up through the 40's. Men and women respected each other's uniqueness and right to exclusive assembly. People left their doors unlocked at night and strangers often warmly spoke to each other as they passed on the street. Doctors made house calls at all hours, while bankers made home loans at 3 percent. A night's diversion was Gable at the Bijou

and a few beers afterwards, rather than mud wrestling at the Flamingo and feverish snorts of cocaine. Taxes were paltry irritants that pricked at people's salaries instead of the despotic extortions that now lay waste to their futures.

Baseball players loved the game more than the money, while fans in turn loved the players more than the exposes. Teenagers went to scout meetings without fear of drive-by shootings. Schools revered the lessons of history instead of the latest in political correctness.

Yes, Americans of this era had a racial problem that sneered contemptuously at their founding principles. But there were pundits on the scene that spoke with sagacity and sanity about how to rectify this problem without unleashing the political furies of hell that we grapple with now. They spoke largely to deaf ears, but the country's soundness of soul provided such spokesmen if her intellectuals and politicians had wanted to listen.

Yes, Americans of the 30's and 40's were a bit uptight and awkward about the big sexual questions. But they still managed to point their lives in a straight line without the fatuities of psycho-therapy and today's unseemly openness concerning genitalia. They just discreetly picked up their sexual proprieties as they did their social duties -- from those elders for whom they felt a special sense of admiration. They didn't need Oprah, and Hefner, and psycho-babble, and getting in touch with their feelings. They led fine, full lives and got along very nicely without such humbug "enlightenment."

If you, the reader, were alive and cognizant in that era from 1930 to 1950, then you've got to be wondering where we're headed with this runaway lunacy train that the modern "experts" in Washington have fashioned for us with their fiat money and confiscatory taxes. True, politicians are not solely to blame for the out-of-control nature of our society. Nihilistic professors and writers and movie producers, along with craven businessmen and bankers, have certainly chucked their 2-cents worth into creating the social dissipation that permeates our country today.

But if you're wondering why life used to churn at a decidedly slower and healthier pace, it was because Americans had social and psychological *restraints* in the 30's and 40's. They didn't worship at the altar of "Immediacy" like the young-pup offspring of the dropout generation do today. They knew that anything of real value could only be gleaned from personal, gut-wrenching effort and ingenuity over long drawn-out periods of time. They would have been ashamed to petition Congress for "ameliorating legislation" and "lavish entitlements" as the electorate so proudly does today. A man's problems were his and his family's. Americans of that era didn't spill their dirty laundry out into the public square either; they extolled a sense of privacy. Shallow know-nothings like Roseanne Barr and Jessica Simpson stayed mired in backwater bergs punching time clocks, instead of divulging the gaucheries of their daily lives via prime time media.

There were so many things that were resplendent about those years and so many things that are depressing about today. But more than anything else, I think what defined the period so illuminatingly was that, even though three-quarters of the era was mired in grim depression and war, there was a deeply seated dignity and profoundness about the human condition. Life had immense import, where now it is demonstrably base and trivialized. We've relinquished the Olympian standards of excellence -- in the home, in the workplace, in our banks, even in the arena of sports.

Much of the character and Olympian import of the era was surely tied up in the fact that Americans of that generation were still largely a religious people. They believed in a transcendent power to whom they were answerable. It lent a strikingly different dimension to one's daily life. Young people, raised in today's facile secular environment, cannot begin to fathom the difference in life that such a view played.

Pronouncements such as this naturally send liberals into seizures of disputation, but despite all their frothing at the mouth upon hearing encomiums to religion, this was the source of America's strength in days

gone by. This was where the Olympian standards were nourished. This was why capitalism used to work without atomizing us as a people, and why freedom was dignified instead of decadent. Our Judeo-Christian ideals gave to society an *objective moral concept of right and wrong*, which acted as both a spiritual star upon which to hitch our ambitions and a theoretical fence with which to contain our vices. The social pathologies of the past 40 years are simply the result of the *relativist* moral and philosophical chickens unleashed by liberalism at the turn of the century overwhelming our spiritual ideals and plunging Western societies into Nietzsche's abyss where right and wrong no longer exist. The *relativist* chickens are now coming home to roost in a wasteland of their own making.

It is horrifying to speculate on what kind of country our academic and political leaders of 2055 will be reigning over if we as a people do not find it in our power to return to universal standards of behavior in the next half-century. If we cannot muster the personal strength and independence to stop the runaway lunacy train onto which we have loaded ourselves and retrace our path to that time in which the legacies of our Founders still reigned, if we cannot muster the collective will to make such an ideological return, there is no chance for us to redeem our destiny as a nation.

The hope for the future lies always in a people's continual remembrance of times gone by and their grasp of the Olympian standards that are seared into humanity's conscience over the centuries through the painful trials of governing man's corruptible nature. That our lives as a people are now ever more frenzied, chaotic and nihilistic suggests that our memories of the past have been discarded like so much cerebral litter along a raunchy and shortsighted highway of illusion.

America's traditional faith in democracy and her perennial "reinventions of government" are naught but frail ramparts set against an increasing tidal wave of statism born from the 20th century's turn to alien philosophy. Such ramparts will afford us neither reprieve nor restoration. Our restoration can come only with a return to the higher-law doctrine that animated the last of the intrepid Americans born before FDR and the Nanny State -- those men and women who forged the fire of their aspirations from the long historical calls of freedom, duty, and honor, refusing to shirk from the mandates of self-reliance that Nature's God has handed to each and everyone of us.

Contrary to the acolytes of liberalism, great reverence for days gone by is not a wasteful game of nostalgia. It is an ever-needed public reinvigoration of civilization's compass so that following generations can chart the future congruously and heroically.

A terrible day of reckoning now looms over the horizon that is going to crash our society upon the economic rocks of a demanding and punishing reality -- a reality that we as a people have flaunted in our hubris and our greed for the unearned. In the aftermath of this looming crash, there will be a dire need for guidance. We will need examples held up to us of how men and women are supposed to conduct their lives.

The WW II generation that came of age in the 30's and 40's was filled with a courage and sublimity that could help to save us as a people and guide us out of the coming maelstrom. We need only to open our minds to the power of its truths, and we could acquire a newfound verve to propel us into a rebirth of the America that we lost. The past is forever vital prologue. Our future lies in never forgetting the verities that lie in its mists.

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For several years in the nineties, he worked with Citizens for an Alternative Tax System (CATS) out of Washington, DC promoting the cause of tax reform and repeal of the federal income tax. In 1998, he was featured along with Congressmen Bill Archer, Dick Armey, and Billy Tauzin in *Texas Business* magazine as one of Texas' leading tax reformers ("Texas Tea Party," May-June 1998).

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