

2016, a Wonder Year

Written by Alex Baer

Tuesday, 30 August 2016 14:50

If it were possible, I'd have Perry Mason voted in as President, and be done with it -- even though the intellectual giants on the right would no doubt fear Perry's last name, and start up a whirlwind of vaporous Illuminati rumors.

With Perry, there would be no lack of adjectives describing his countless strengths, for any slogans and logos: Infallible, fair, energetic, driven, brilliant, supremely knowledgeable, not easily outwitted, modest, humane -- the litany could go on like that for days.

Perry, though. *Not* Raymond Burr, mind you, even if that fine actor were still with us, but *Perry Mason*, the character we saw portrayed on *The One-Eyed Know-It-All* which invaded American households so long ago.

(I could easily see Della as VP -- no one else was as crisply efficient, warmly interpersonal, or as knowing of the mind of Mason any better. Tragg and Burger? Maybe the AG's office or DOJ. Paul would likely end up at the FBI, maybe the CIA, the DIA, the XYQZW...)

In these dog days of August, and these psychodrama-daze of 2016 national politics, there is lots to wonder about. And, I find myself wondering about them an awful lot.

One thing I wonder is how it is anyone ever treated Donald Trump like an actual political candidate. The man was a fluff-headed, self-aggrandizing, ill-adjusted buffoon with social and psychiatric issues from the outset. He has only gotten worse sense he started -- either pushed in that direction or else his own mental state has been allowed to slip the leash and meander its own demonically-merry way.

Is it the persistence of false memory which is at fault here, as our having seen him on *The Holy Teevee Screen* portraying the character Trump himself never was, which has so delighted and fascinated and gripped tight so many despairing Americans? Was it seeing this person wield apparent power, make apparent decisions, produce apparent business results like no other?

Even at the peak of his television powers, Trump was merely a dust mite on Mason's lapel, a residue of ink from a pen, a crumb of toast from breakfast, accidentally riding in a cuff.

I am thinking it takes less to fool us as a people than it used to. Mason's fictional successes and struggles? These were at least based in reality, small morality plays marching toward justice, via compassion, hard work, and sheer brainpower.

Trump's? They are based in a bubble -- blown, rigged, and stage-lit by moneymakers who wanted a cheap program to sell to the networks. No discernible messages were apparent, unless you count humiliation, ridicule, and deprivation. The theme, if there was one, depended on one punch-line, overused, about arbitrary power which could be used absolutely -- whether rightly or wrongly. *Dictatorially*, one could easily say.

The rewards for showboating, speaking drivel, and doing nothing of substance? Vast wealth, being elevated, honored, being deferred to, being pampered and made king!

Somehow, people bought the Trump package hook, line, and sinker. It probably says something about the current American dream: Get rich by doing nothing, then say whatever you want, do whatever you want, *and stop bothering me about obligations toward my country, the world, my fellow humans...*

It also says something about human psychology -- the need of the desperate to envision a singular strong-man taking the helm, and fixing the stalled ship of state. (No matter that the boat will go where without a crew. No matter that the previous captain hurled the ship of state up onto the rocks. No matter that the current inability to move the ship off the rocks any faster comes from the obstruction offered by the very same crew....)

Winning the lottery used to be the previous Big Dream hereabouts, in previous decades, especially during the *Greed is Great* 80s, tyhe *Let 'em Eat Toast* 90s, the *More for Me and Screw You* double-aughts, and now, in the *Let Me Be Trump* tens, too...

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No responsibility, no leashes, no mind- or tongue-brakes, no steering, just all free-fall, all the time, in the nice, shiny, golden world of *Ain't I Somethin' and Don't You Wish You Were Me!*

Disturbing, all of it.

The man, the teevee show -- the suckers lining up, scrambling for more shiny-thing bling...

All of it.

* * *

And so, the party of Lincoln is now the Party of Trump. Say that ten times. out loud -- real loud and proud! -- without retching or catching a case of the dry heaves, I dare you.

OK, how about once? Go ahead: Say that out loud and pause a while: *The party of Lincoln is now the Party of Trump!*

Let the sound, and the idea, resonate with you. Watch the air turn a sickly
Exorcist
-green as you wait.

This is the color being painted all over the land: In people's minds and hearts. In our hopes and dreams. And for all our puzzled friends, and excited enemies, to see.

* * *

I'm sure -- *positive, in fact* -- that the founders of our country provided freedom of speech in

order that no idea be automatically or arbitrarily dismissed or extinguished from any discussions about who we, and our country, are and might yet be.

Their idea was that the populace, being informed and engaged, would judge all ideas in the marketplace, and come to some level of agreement about the value of any idea or ideas.

Today, the marketplace -- as a communications interchange -- exists as never before, but the participants are unarmed to do any battle of wits. The citizenry is not especially interested in doing any of the work required by citizenship.

There is little vigorous discussion and even less rigorous intellect and fact applied it. All of us suffer in that disquieting quiet -- even though the roar of communications is a Chunnel-sized firehose, not a straw's worth of sane discussion comes from it.

There are no new or relevant facts brought before the court of public opinion, no discussions, no debates. There is no adversarial combat of intellect, no need for ideas to collide and be tested.

At best, one side shows up, armed with facts, ready to defend its theories and desires, while another side refuses to participate, wants only to say "no!" or simply refutes facts with feelings, suspicions, wild tales, silly theories, or drool-based gibberish.

At worst, one side shows up, armed with facts, ready to defend its theories and desires, and is completely unable to engage with or refute the assertions of the other side, unable to find any common language at all.

Most days, the best and the worse are the same thing.

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There was no television in the days of the founders. Whatever their faults, they at least engaged one another with their ideas, and cared enough to try to find a good route for the country and its people to take.

* * *

Television, when it was invented, by the way, was heralded as an incredibly versatile new educational tool. It rapidly became, like all communication inventions, a way to make money. On the way to doing so, television was also discovered to be an incredible new tool for spreading information, as well as disinformation, and then propaganda -- *and for selling anything at all* , not just soap and cornflakes.

* * *

I try to play fair. I went searching -- mentally at first, and then online -- for the most recent Republican politician I respected, as a person, as a human, as an individual, and for the work he or she has espoused doing, and then actually doing, while in office.

A few candidates popped up in the running -- mostly, people who switched party affiliation, from the GOP to the Dems, and what-not, who then went on to write books about their harrowing, frustrating, mind-blowingly frustrating (even for the tameness of their times) experiences within the GOP.

I ended up where I thought I might: *Dwight D. Eisenhower*. He served as President from 1953 to 1961. That was about 60 years ago, about the time needed for three generations, and maybe one more, to come to be, and carry on.

60 years is a very long drought of intelligence in any one political party. It is a long time for the absence of focus on facts, an absence of true leadership, and an absence of honest humility.

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I think Republicans need to get busy, shake the stardust and ratings out of their eyes, wean themselves off their favorite flavors of alt-right heroin, and get busy finding and developing some Eisenhowers.

* * *

Perry Mason is getting awfully bored, waiting to debate the facts with someone interested in facts, and who is still sane, and still interested enough to try to find a way forward for the country and all its people -- not just the people occupying the very top of the pyramid.

The founders, meanwhile, are growing restless, watching us soak and bask in the rays of a jelly-headed, addlepatated, and foppish nincompoop.

* * *

Two hundred and forty years, and some days, since 1776. Maybe you're starting to wonder about 2016 now, too.

* * *

It might hurt some at first, but it goes away quickly, and it's a great habit to get into, thinking is. A lot of our countrymen are going to need the practice.

They'll be looking for teachers, and mentors. Someone to show them *how*.

Someday. Some year. Just not *this* year, I imagine.

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Today's Bonus:

Run Ike's farewell address, and measure his intellectual stature amongst the Republican mental-midgets of today. (If you didn't know better, you'd almost swear you were watching a Democrat here -- such is the degree of lurching-about the American political landscape has done, toward the far wing-nut right!)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OyBNmecVtdU>