

Fundamental Change NOW

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Most Americans aren't avid students of history and don't know much about the Great Depression of the 1930s. For that matter, the majority of Americans understand precious little about this country's history before 1950, and the number of younger Americans ignorant of pretty much anything that happened before 1990 is disturbingly high. That might be attributed to human nature, or to the urgent seductions of pop culture, but I worry that the sorry state of American education is at least partially to blame.

Since most readers of this commentary are probably not within the demographic groups of know-littles or know-nothings, I won't presume to turn this into a full-blown history lesson. I do need to reference a bit about what FDR (President Franklin D. Roosevelt) proposed and achieved in the early 1930s, specifically in the creation of government-sponsored jobs programs (WPA, CCC, and the like), as well as the implementation of a mandated and permanent "tax" on individual wages, the revenues from which would go into a special fund that would later be repaid after retirement. Essentially a forced savings program, Social Security was designed to provide an economic safety net for older Americans. These days, Social Security is sacrosanct among the population, although Republicans would still love to kill it.

During the 1920s — the so-called "Roaring Twenties" — when America was besotted with the acquisition of personal wealth (a dangerous condition that overtakes us periodically, and has once again spawned epic proportions of wealth inequality in America), such massive federal programs of worker relief and basic public well-being would have been unthinkable. The rule in America had always been that, if you didn't amass enough wealth to take care of yourself in later life, you were to blame, and should family or friends fail you for needed support in keeping body and soul together, tough luck. Any remedial measures by government were considered far too "radical" to even think about, much less implement. That sentiment changed in the wake of the economic meltdown of 1929-1931.

"Radical" is a word never to be spoken in America without immediately provoking a knee-jerk reaction of complete negativity from most elites, nearly all politicians, and a significant portion of the masses. The word has become almost indelibly associated with bomb-throwing anarchists of the late 19th century and the totalitarian communists of the Soviet Union. What's perverse, though, is that the economic system we've created, built, and enshrined as holy here in America

— greed-based predatory capitalism — is not conservative or moderate at all. It's downright radical.

Starting about 12,000 years ago with the creation of the first "states," 200,000 years of relative equality within and peace between the hunter-gatherer-forager kinship communities of human beings that constituted humanity's original "culture" was overturned. Prior to that, conflicts occurred, of course — humans are contentious — but they were avoided as much as possible. Cooperation was as present as competition. That changed with the onset of agriculture and appearance of states. Previously, our territoriality had been relatively fluid, but permanent settlement and individual ownership of property elevated the masculine trait of competition over more feminine cooperation. Along with the creation of money as a medium of exchange, the revolution of "civilization" took root. The few began to dominate the many. This shift took awhile, developing gradually over a number of millennia, but it was as radical a change as could be imagined. We don't consider it radical, though, because it's been in place for long enough to now seem "normal."

And so, we're faced with a language problem, where the implications of words are turned upside down. In terms of how modern society operates, "normal" is actually radical (i.e., extreme), while "radical" is often fundamental and much more sane. So, the radicalism of the modern world is seen as inevitable — just the way things are, have been, and always will be — slavery, for example, and hierarchies of social class based on birth or wealth. But, like the title of Gershwin's song from *Porgy and Bess*, it ain't necessarily so. Anyway, the reversal of meanings for radical and normal is why I've entitled this commentary "*Fundamental* Change NOW" rather than "*Radical* Change NOW." I might have used the word "Necessary," but I'll leave it at "Fundamental."

FDR's New Deal didn't end the Great Depression. No, the recovery occurred finally due to the crisis of World War II and America's gearing up its industrial might to fight that war. Still, the New Deal was profoundly significant as a "radical" shift in how Americans understood the role of the federal government. FDR and many like-minded people understood in 1932 that what had been normal wasn't going to cut it. Despite much opposition, they pushed through fundamental changes that seemed not only compassionate but necessary.

Although the New Deal didn't *end* the Great Depression, it did accomplish a significant reduction in hardship and suffering for tens of millions of Americans. The various programs gave working people a sense that they weren't simply on their own or being thrown under the bus.

For the past four decades, America has faced a similar predicament, where the welfare of the general public — especially the bottom 80% -- has been ignored more and more in favor of the greed that predatory capitalism loves so much. The social safety net has been systematically dismantled. The few have once again enslaved the many. Those two factors — the greed of some contrasted to the discontent of many — loom large in the rise to the White House of Donald

Trump. Now, however, given both the unsustainable economics of that course and the viral pandemic decimating America, this situation of “radical normalcy” has reached the dire proportions of full, urgent crisis.

It appears that Joe Biden intends to pursue the course of “re-uniting” Americans and renewing “normalcy” in economic, social, and foreign policies. Look at his cabinet picks — they’re all dyed-in-the-wool institutionalists who serve the system as it was before Trump was chosen to bring out his wrecking ball (which he’s still doing now with increased fervor in his final Nero-like days of burning down Rome before leaving). Yeah, many of Biden’s picks are women, but they’re all basically conservative, right-leaning Democrats (essentially Republican-Lite). Clearly, Biden is well-intentioned in wanting to ameliorate the widespread exhaustion, profound mistrust, desperate fear, and deep anger of so many Americans, but is it enough for him to become (as I’ve written before) the “Consoler-in-Chief”? I think not.

From where I sit, the Biden administration is set up to succeed in the short run but fail in the long-term. By fail, I mean open the door to the next Trump. While I don’t consider Trump’s current intention to run again in 2024 even remotely viable, given his age and vulnerable exposure to prosecution by a gaggle of state attorneys-general and local DAs eager to pounce as soon as he leaves office, I worry that whichever rising star in the Trump Cult eventually wins the competition to become his successor (like *The Apprentice* all over again) will then have a good shot at re-taking the White House. And that person — whoever it is — probably won’t be the incompetent buffoon that Trump was. No, the future King or Queen of Mayhem and Death Culture will almost certainly be much more sophisticated and nuanced in the ability to pull the wool over the eyes of more than just a third of Americans, thus making the complete destruction of whatever remains of this country much more likely.

What do I think we need? Well, for starters, we need another New Deal. It won’t be enough just to make the minimum wage \$15 an hour. We need a bunch of FUNDAMENTAL changes. One possibility is a guaranteed annual wage for every working-class American, perhaps \$15,000 per year for a single individual and proportionately more for people providing for a family. And don’t tell me we can’t afford it. We spend almost a trillion dollars a year on the military.

Another critical change is government-sponsored work programs that will provide employment (and income) for millions of Americans. The first and most obvious arenas for such programs are in medicine (addressing the pandemic) and education for our children. We already need (and are going to need) tons more people to test for the virus and administer vaccines. Then, we need to revamp primary public education with millions more teachers. Beyond that, we could employ workers for infrastructure renewal and shifting away from fossil fuels.

Those suggestions aren’t the only changes we need to implement — the list of urgent imperatives for re-structuring America is long — but they would represent a good start.

The issue here isn't socialism versus capitalism. That's a false dichotomy. The issue is how we want to alter the socialism we already have in place (which currently serves only the wealthy) and sanely restrict the neoliberal delusion of unregulated and unrestrained corporate capitalism. What we need is more socialism for regular people and measures to limit obscene concentrations of wealth, whether of individuals or corporations. The way the economic system works now is simply deranged. We've attempted to address this before with trust-busting and the New Deal, and we can do it again.

But Bill, don't you realize that America isn't ready for these changes? Politically, Republicans will never stand for anything in that direction, and Democrats are comfortable with their Big Donor Money and have no stomach for true reform. And "the people" are still lost in fantasy, although differing segments of the public embrace very conflicting delusions. Yes, I do understand that. We are unlikely as a nation to choose the path of fundamental change in a sane manner. But we're going to suffer increasing pain and loss until we do, and that process — in a kind of "force majeure," despite most of it being of our own making — is already underway and about to get much worse.

To assert that astrology is far from a perfect system is a serious understatement, but (in my opinion) it does reveal much about human beings, both individually and collectively. What it tells us about ourselves is often couched in a symbolic language we don't understand and doesn't translate the way we'd like, but it's valuable nonetheless.

Given that America's Pluto Return in 2022-2024 is bearing down on us already (I've written about the symbolism of that momentous astrological event in previous commentaries and will have more to say as it nears), we're going to have to rethink who we are and how we live. We'll have to do something radical. Uh, I mean *fundamental*.

The questions in my mind are: *How bad will things have to get and how many Americans will have to suffer and die before we cry "Uncle" and begin to make the changes necessary to prevent (or at least limit) total disaster?* 2020 has shown us a "sneak preview" of what's coming, but it appears that too many of us missed the Memo from Cosmic Central. We still imagine that "normal" can be resuscitated. It can't. Normal is dead. It was ill for a long time and has now succumbed.

Astrologically, 2021 might be something of a respite from the storm. But I'm not optimistic about the three years after that. America is cruisin' for a bruising, and anyone not completely hypnotized by the seductive fantasies so prevalent in our culture knows it.