

The Next 9-11

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Version 1.5 (posted on 16 November 2021)

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Today is my birthday. I'm 72 years old. To celebrate, I've decided to "let my freak flag fly," to borrow a lyric sung by David Crosby in the Crosby, Stills, Nash, and Young song, "Almost Cut My Hair," from their 1970 album *Déjà Vu*. Here's the entire first stanza:

*Almost cut my hair
It happened just the other day
It's gettin' kinda long
I coulda said it was in my way
But I didn't, and I wonder why
I feel like letting my freak flag fly
Yes, I feel like I owe it to someone*

Long hair in men was a cultural phenomenon from the 1960s that began modestly with the Beatles "mop top" haircuts (which were mocked early on by comedians wearing "Beatles' wigs" in movies and TV shows, such as *The Ed Sullivan Variety Show*). That morphed quickly into longer hair among young men, which sparked the whole "Is it a boy or a girl?" derisive backlash from the mainstream (an early foreshadowing of today's gender bending with all its attendant hand-wringing). By 1968, long hair among young men had grown into both a cultural symbol and a political signature, overtly denoting membership in the anti-war, sex, drugs, and rock 'n roll subculture.

Of course, by that time Frank Zappa and the Mothers of Invention had already lampooned the superficial trappings of youth rebellion, skewering long hair as little more than a fad. Even so, if you were a young man in 1969 with long hair (as I was) and met another guy with long hair, you knew instantly that he was indeed your brother. That lasted for all of about five minutes, though, before the voracious machinery of the consumer marketplace co-opted and devoured all the symbols of the youth counterculture — long hair, bell bottoms, catchphrases (like "Far out" or "Out of sight"), etc. — and ruthlessly squeezed out every last drop of meaning, leaving nothing but empty style hawked to make money.

My days of long hair are, of course, long gone. The joke is that, as an old man, I now have precious little hair left on my head.

Nonetheless, my radical cultural and political sensibilities have remained. If anything, I am even more radical today than I was 50 years ago. Hard to imagine, but true. Always disdainful of the American Empire and its Death Culture, I am more convinced than ever that we were right even back then. By "we," I mean the roughly 20% of Boomers who rebelled in more than merely

temporary or adolescent ways, the ones who never surrendered or sold out to become stock brokers, corporate lawyers, and real estate agents. Yes, we were young and foolish, but we were right, goddammit, about almost everything — politics, culture, history, art, food, health, spirituality, anti-war, and anti-nuke — the whole motherfucking nine yards. America was wrong, we knew it, and we were right.

Back in 2001, in the aftermath of 9-11, pretty much the entire country went ape-shit in a convulsive fit of patriotic, jingoistic fervor, with a serious hard-on for violent revenge. Those were the days when President George W. Bush (or rather, his cabal of neoconservative advisors) came up the “War on Terror” and the “Axis of Evil,” plus the bogus pronouncement that *“they hate us for our freedoms.”* Having lost the Soviet Union as our longstanding arch-enemy, America needed new adversaries to justify stoking the coffers of the military-industrial complex, and 9-11 provided them handily. Iran, Iraq, and North Korea were selected initially as our new antagonists, then later on Cuba, Libya, and Syria were added. Venezuela and Bolivia have now been nominated. We even coined the term “failed state” to describe any country we didn’t like, although that has turned out to be something of a subconscious projection.

In late 2001, offering any public pushback to counter the mainstream 9-11 narratives or challenge America’s upwelling tide of collective rage for Old Testament-style lethal vengeance meant running the risk of social censure. Here’s one example: At the time of the attacks, Ward Churchill was a professor of ethnic studies whose academic area of specialty was the historical treatment of political dissenters and Native Americans by the U.S. government. Within days after 9-11, Churchill wrote and published an essay where he argued that the attacks were provoked by the imperialism of America’s foreign policy.

In his essay, Churchill referred to some employees working for financial firms in the World Trade Center who had died on 9-11 as *“technocrats”* and *“little Eichmanns.”* Needless to say, his essay was not well received. Churchill’s use of Nazi imagery to tar America’s financial imperium, seemingly in defense of the Saudis who hijacked commercial jets and then crashed them into the Twin Towers and the Pentagon, provoked immediate and massive backlash. The firestorm that erupted made headlines for weeks on every major media news outlet, from print to TV. The coverage was almost universally negative toward Churchill. Much of it felt like a lynch mob and resembled movie villagers with pitchforks hunting down the Frankenstein monster.

Churchill was unapologetic and showed no contrition for his words. His employer — the University of Colorado at Boulder — subsequently began an investigation into allegations of academic research misconduct by Churchill that culminated some years later in his dismissal from the University. Afterwards, Churchill sued the university for wrongful termination, but he lost the case. Well, duh — big surprise there...

Many people, even some on the Left, felt that Churchill had “asked for it” with his traitorous comments, and that he should have known better. America has

a long history of harsh treatment toward those it sees as politically deviant or potentially disloyal. The 1919 Palmer Raids that got Emma Goldman deported to Russia, the internment of Japanese-Americans in World War II, and the horrific situation currently faced by Wikileaks' founder Julian Assange are just a few telling examples of how America deals with anyone it doesn't like.

For me, what Ward Churchill did after 9-11 and the subsequent consequences he suffered amount to an object lesson and cautionary tale about how skeletons in one's closet can and will be cited by institutions to justify punishment for airing unpopular views that challenge the mainstream narratives. Whether or not the skeletons are real doesn't matter. In America, speaking out can be dangerous to one's reputation and livelihood if it challenges the existing power structure. I'm inclined to think that this is true for all Empires, not just America. Also, I feel strongly that anyone who believes that only North Korea or China punish dissenters is dead wrong. Peel back our thin veneer of "free speech," and we discover that this country is not nearly as different as some people presume. America is hardly the Shining City on the Hill. I wish it were, but it's not.

As my birthday present to myself, I want to make a very simple assertion, and do so publicly. Over the two decades since 9-11, America's actions have not decreased the possibility of another attack on the scale of 9-11 or even larger. Despite all the money, technology, and manpower we have poured into "national security," American impact on the world over these past 20 years has served to *increase* that possibility. The rest of the world doesn't like us nearly as much as it once did, and with damn good reason.

Actually, though, it's not the rest of the world that worries me. Odds are steadily increasing that the next major trauma will probably come from *within* America, not from outside. Other cultures and countries don't have to take us down by force. All they need do is wait for us to implode or collapse. The saddest part of this is that our coming apart is very likely to further harm humanity beyond our borders, and might even go so far as to threaten all life on earth. But then, where in the world can one go to find collective sanity? It's not looking good for humanity almost anywhere.

Now, I'm not Ward Churchill. I don't need to call anyone a Nazi — "crazy" is a good enough descriptive term for my purposes, and even my continuing references to "Death Culture" probably won't provoke serious backlash. But even if it does, I don't have that much to lose. No job, no position of stature, no legion of a million followers. Oh, I suppose the powers that be could find a way to punish me anyway, but they hardly need to. I'm an insignificant small fry, just an old man on his way out who's unworthy of their time and trouble. At least that's what I hope.

Still, I am compelled from my own inner sense of mission to stand up and say what I see, think, and feel, no matter how radical, wrong, or unacceptable that may seem to some people. Like the last line in the Crosby, Stills, Nash, and Young song "Almost Cut My Hair" — *I feel like I owe it to someone.*