

# The Struggle to Forgive

by Bill Herbst

*Version 1.4 (posted on 24 January 2023)  
© 2023 by the author, all rights reserved*

Today I want to talk about a problem that's vexing to me. The problem is my seeming inability to feel forgiveness for two types of people: chronic, habitual liars and the people duped by them.

Some of the liars are the same people I've been calling Monsters. They lie knowingly, without remorse, and usually for personal gain of some sort — power or wealth or social status. Another portion of the liars are people who are seriously self-deluded. They don't know that they're lying because they actually believe their own lies.

The other category is all the people duped by the liars. This includes millions of Americans entranced by any of the false narratives (mainstream or otherwise) created and promoted by the liars, all of whom are thus hypnotized into acting as robotic automatons.

I'll use two examples of arenas where these falsehoods of mass hypnosis occur — politics and medicine. But first, a little background to set the scene.

I've been a political and cultural radical since the late 1960s. I started out in my childhood during the 1950s fully willing to be a "good American," and that held until about the end of junior high. By high school, however, which for me was the mid-1960s, the bloom was already coming off the rose. Patriotism, capitalism, consumerism, corporatism — all the many dimensions of the mainstream narrative, including belief in American Exceptionalism and our presumed status as "the good guys" and "the greatest country on earth" — began to unravel. The horror of Vietnam, the emptiness of suburbia, the injustices that provoked the civil rights movement, the increasing rebelliousness of folk-pop-rock music, underground magazines like Paul Krassner's scathingly brilliant and sardonic The Realist (to which I subscribed and read eagerly in high school) — all that was being absorbed into my adolescent consciousness. Although still somewhat in the fold, I was less and less likely to embrace my culture and my country as they were.

Then the halcyon year of 1968 happened. The Tet offensive in the Vietnam War and Walter Cronkite's stunning public admission that the war was unwinnable provided a widening crack for open dissent that was for me a gaping chasm.

On the heels of the Beatles' Sergeant Pepper and San Francisco's acid rock scene (Jefferson Airplane, the Grateful Dead), I took my first psychedelic drug trips. I'd already begun smoking marijuana my freshman year in college (fall, 1967), and by mid-1968 I'd undergone numerous encounters with LSD, peyote buttons (mescaline) and psilocybin mushrooms, all of which cemented for me the transformative experience of "consciousness expansion" (or whatever that was). The happy dreams of Walt Disney were relegated to childhood and supplanted by the darker and more complicated dreams of Carlos Castañeda and Don Juan.

Politically and socially, the civil rights riots that had occurred in 1964 plainly revealed who was on which side, and the assassinations of both Martin Luther King and Bobby Kennedy during the summer of 1968 made my radicalization a done deal. An exclamation point to my new status was added with the debacle of the Democratic National Convention in Chicago and Richard Nixon's subsequent election to the Presidency.

Woodstock and the Moon Landing in 1969 were footnotes to my change — significant but unnecessary, since by that time the die was already cast. After 1968, there was no going back. I morphed into a permanent and life-long radical. Whatever love for my country I'd felt earlier in childhood was shattered beyond repair. Any hand-on-heart patriotism in me was like Humpty Dumpty after the Fall — all the king's horses and all the king's men couldn't restore it. To add insult to injury, damned little has happened since in America to motivate me toward resuscitating or resurrecting that lost love.

1968 was more than 50 years ago, and my entire ensuing adulthood has been devoted to challenging the many mainstream narratives promoted from the power centers of an America that I loathe. I respect sincerity and truthfulness, and I try to honor both when I find them, but almost all the narratives produced, promoted, and distributed by the American Empire have been utterly bogus as far as I'm concerned. And yet, however cringe-worthy they seem to me, most of these narratives are still accepted, embraced, and often even fervently believed by a surprisingly large proportion of the American population, who, it turns out, are among the most easily duped people on the planet. Give us a few toys, and apparently we'll accept just about anything.

Along the way, life in this country has gotten worse, not better. The ever-increasing cognitive dissonance between ideals and realities has coalesced primarily into a shape I regard as tragically wrong-headed — namely, a neoliberal revolution and culture meltdown that pushed America even further to the right, into relentless predatory capitalism, horrific wealth inequality, and full-bore class wars. Whether Republican or Democrat, each president since the Reagan 1980s had furthered the shift toward the right — Clinton and Obama every bit as much so as the two Bushes. Over the past six years, Trump was the sorry-ass but logical result of that neoliberal revolt, and Biden is little more than Trump with less bombast.

And so (as I have written), the Monsters have won. No one in power speaks for the people, who have been abandoned to a sad fate. The Great Reset is already underway, and the bottom 80% (which is most of us) have been chosen as the sacrificial lambs. National security has nothing to do with the welfare of regular, ordinary Americans. Instead, it's all about maintaining the American Empire's raw power, as well as protecting the wealth and privileges of those who wield that power.

My problem is this: Given that I'm well into Act Three — my elder hood — with rapidly declining health, how am I to maintain any positive emotional basis for the remaining years of my life? Hell, it's hard enough for me to accept and love myself in all my flawed fallibility. If I hate others, that makes all of my conditions worse. Forgiveness is the only palliative I see that might succeed in helping me to reduce my own suffering and set me up to help others reduce theirs at least a little.

And yet, forgiveness is a bitch. I'm thinking today in particular of two different arenas — political and medical — where I would like to exercise forgiveness, but am running up against obstacles in myself.

First is the Democratic Party, specifically the so-called "progressive" wing of that political entity. "Regular" (i.e., corporate-beholden and institutional) Democrats, such as Nancy Pelosi and Chuck Schumer, are hopelessly corrupt. Their status as Monsters is almost cartoonish. I won't forgive them, but who cares? No, it's "the Squad" that upsets me. This is the small group of younger "progressives" that were swept into office in 2018 and 2020, primarily as a reaction to Trump Derangement Syndrome. I'm thinking most pointedly of Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, known now primarily by her initials — AOC.

A young, attractive Latina, Ocasio-Cortez was not only engaging and eloquent during the 2018 campaign, but the most outspoken and strident of the progressive candidates, promising to go to Washington from her district in the Bronx and "kick up a ruckus" within the staid, do-nothing Democratic Caucus. She was a firebrand, and a breath of fresh air. AOC said all the right things, ticked all the right boxes, and she got elected. A quick rise to celebrity followed. She was adored by the left and hated by the right.

What's happened since AOC was elected? Her status as a firebrand has cooled, and the fresh air has grown stale. Her promise to raise a ruckus never materialized, and her rebellious assertion during the 2018 campaign that it was better to serve only one term than cave in to careerism proved meaningless. Early on, it became all too apparent that AOC didn't have the stomach for hardball politics. She was, in Texas jargon, "all hat and no cattle," as she caved to the power hierarchy of corporate Democrats. AOC virtually licked Nancy Pelosi's boots, without gaining a shred of leverage to push for cherished

progressive policy dreams, such as Medicare for All and a \$15 minimum wage. Almost overnight, she became an institutionalist.

Turns out the AOC is just another ambitious political hack who's been seduced by the glamor of personal power and social privilege. And yet, she seems to believe her own bullshit. In interviews, she vigorously defends her actions, denying her obvious betrayals, excoriating her critics, and blaming voters for supposedly not understanding how "real" power works. At this point, AOC's protestations are increasingly incoherent, little more than political double-speak. She has become little more than an accomplished snake-oil salesman.

Despite this, many "liberal" voters still believe in AOC as their progressive heroine and savior of the Democratic party. They've drunk the Kool-Aid and continue to buy her propaganda. They've been duped, which makes me want to scream at them to WAKE THE FUCK UP!!! Basically, I can't make any headway at all toward forgiving the Democrats, AOC and the Squad, or the voters who continue to believe their lying fairy tales.

The second arena is the COVID pandemic. No other event in my memory has so completely ripped off the mask of rotten-to-the-core institutionalized American corruption — revealing that so many of those in charge who wield either formal or de facto authority near the very top of the pecking order are untrustworthy.

Turns out that damn near everything the public was told in 2020 about COVID was lies — from its hidden origins as a biological weapon, followed by its escape from confinement in a lab into the outside world, then through the initial reactions of the various institutions charged with protecting the public and the numerous policy pronouncements that followed (masking, social distancing, business lockdowns, corrupt authorization of untested vaccines, adamant refusal to admit that other viable treatments existed, continuing false assurances to the public, punitive vaccine mandates and denouncement of anyone who rejected getting vaccinated or otherwise questioned the official narrative, etc.). At every level, the pandemic was a clusterfuck of lies.

Even now, after a mountain of damning information has finally leaked out and come to light, we see on the part of so many former go-along-to-get-along cheerleading authorities who lied egregiously a continuing refusal to admit how fucked up so much of that was.

In both arenas — the Democrats and COVID — I struggle to feel any forgiveness toward two distinct groups of people: the Liars and the Duped.

I'm strongly disinclined to forgive AOC and the rest of the Squad for lying to us so brazenly. The same applies to all those medical, pharmaceutical, and governmental "authorities" who lied about COVID. Many of those people did so to protect their careers and income security, which I regard as morally

reprehensible. Obviously, some are Monsters, essentially assholes from the get-go — Pfizer execs, for instance, and that jerk Fauci. But many others were well-meaning, in theory at least, until push came to shove and their own bacon was on the line. I really hate cowardice.

Especially with regard to the public, I can't figure out why I'm having such a hard time forgiving ordinary Americans for being so easily duped. Although I would dearly like to see more savvy among the public, I understand that many (probably most) people in America don't have the time and energy to devote to looking under the rock to see what's there. They don't have access to alternate stories or know how to ferret out those contrary truth-tellings. All they have, all they know, are the mainstream narratives. So, of course they believe them. They accept the fiction that the mRNA vaccines are safe and effective, and they believe that the Democrats are trying to help regular Americans.

So, here we are. I need to forgive all the people I've noted in this commentary for being fucked-up humans. I mean, the bottom line is that I'm not so different. My feet are also clay. In fairness, as an astrologer in a small private practice, I haven't aspired to an institutional position as a keeper of the general public trust. Nor have I pursued the rewards, privileges, and other compensations that come with such lofty positions.

At this point, the people I mentioned still look like Monsters to me. I hope that my attitude about this may change in the future.

As always, time will tell...