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People Power | The Global Commons

America's Dark Passage

What, Really, is the Commons?

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Dark Lord, Dark Victory

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Introit

The fall of the Soviet Union initiated a new passage of American identity. Then the 9/11 War took us a long way down the road to journey's end. This passage is also a migration. America has not simply abandoned one collective identity for another; we have become a different people, a different idea.

Our sacrosanct national narrative of 'redeemer nation' has been rewritten into a perverse story of a chosen people beleaguered and a civilization beset by barbarism. Those wretched of the earth we once so proudly pledged our sacred honor to succor and lift up are now our forever-foe—to be monitored, held down and, if necessary, hounded to the darkest ends of the earth.

But the darkness has instead come into us. While official banners still trumpet American altruism, our own spoken words, daily spun into the network ether of contemporary human consciousness, betray our true intent.

Our actions even speak so much louder. Daily our implacable national energies destroy yet more little bits of human society, no longer in the name of their salvation, but rather for our sake to defend the homeland.

We are the Dark Lord now—the mythic essence of children's nightmares. This is the story of our descent.

Liturgy of the Word [*Proclamation of the Gospel, homily, profession of faith, and intercessions form this part of the Rite. America has its own canon, gospel, sacred narrative and Rite.*]

Americanism is the last surviving of the three universalist faiths to emerge from Western Modernity (Nazism and Soviet Communism having been spectacular failures). The *credo* of Americanism is this: "American Identity is given by God as our mission to redeem humanity." Our identity itself is sacred and decrees that nation and individual are of one body. Hence, Americanism resembles Islam—"There is no God but God and Muhammad is his prophet"—in that that its universalism is not simply vested in the nation, but that its advance is also incumbent on every American citizen. Americanism is also an aggressively proselytizing faith that claims authority because we are a world nation. Indeed, our belief that we are the world is our fundamental argument for the redemptive conversion of all humankind to the faith of Freedom and Democracy, our holiest words.

Our historical method to redeem humanity has been war—to be more precise, holy war. American holy wars have two essential features: Victory comes only from the collective commitment of the whole nation and the passion of its sacrifice. We sacrifice ourselves for all humanity because we are the world. The canon of American sacred narrative is built on war and our two greatest

holy wars were the Civil War and World War II. The Civil War was about the purification of a people who had lost their way by permitting chattel slavery. Redemption came only through heart-rending sacrifice that made the nation more perfect to fulfill God's charge. Mission and transcendence were electrically enunciated in the *Battle Hymn of the Republic* and the *Gettysburg Address*. In World War II, destroying the Dark Faith of Nazism proclaimed that humanity's full redemption was at hand. On that sunlit day in San Francisco—June 26, 1945—we declared a United Nations and so an end to darkness itself. Then another Dark Faith, Soviet Communism, betrayed this hope and postponed transcendence for decades.

Consider the contemporary parable of *World War Z*, the best-selling zombie novel by Max Brooks. As pure American religious homily, the story tells how a people corrupted by success and no longer true to God's mission might again unite through sacrifice. Facing extinction, humanity redeems itself—we transcend with our nation purified. Finding collective commitment and the unity of America and all humanity are the message.

Zombies may be a fantastical trope, but they give this parable its symbolic force. Are not zombies our former selves—hence, the most terrifying and relentless enemy of all? Are not their ranks also flush with those who had lost American virtue: The passive, the narcissistic, the cynical, the uncaring? Sacred wars are about purification, revival and redemption. By indirection, Brooks is making the troubling point as well that only zombies—or a national challenge equally existential—can renew America now.

More than homily, *World War Z* is also a clarion of American apocalyptic literature. In antiquity *apokalupsis* was literally 'the lifting of the veil,' God's final revelation to Mankind. Christian, Jewish and Muslim apocalyptic literature in the 6th and 7th centuries spoke to a consciousness that both feared and embraced a world veering toward final judgment. *World War Z* shows an American people similarly anxious: divided, set against each other, fearful of their decline and the loss of grandeur that is our identity's cherished token. Brooks' story is homily through parable: America can be renewed through the purification of sacrifice—and purification and sacrifice are never more crystalline than in a zombie apocalypse! Never were parable's lessons more powerful!

This central lesson is captured in Dan LuVisi's *Battle of Yonkers* painting. The zombie plague has overrun the New York metropolitan area and the desperate Washington leadership tries to stage a battle opera to reassure Americans that government and its military are still in control. But even in high-tech panoply our professional soldiers, *Gods of War*, are overwhelmed by zombie millions. Battle tanks, precision weapons and thermobaric bombs cannot stop the onrush of death.



The Battle of Yonkers

Only the remaining American people standing shoulder-to-shoulder can vanquish evil and together transcend in battle with the living dead. Only America can redeem humanity, with our sacred king (president) leading the world's nations in the great counteroffensive against the zombie power.

World War Z echoes Orwell's prophecy in 1984 and also of a thermonuclear *The Day After*. Apocalypse, American Style is as faith-based as ancient antecedents, yet it is uniquely our own. Truly understanding the American experience means seeing and accepting the sacred dimension of our national identity and the central role that holy war plays in the passion of American life.

The fall of the Soviet Union was itself an apocalypse, yet this revelation was a sign to Americans of the Millennium rather than God's last judgment. We had vanquished two Dark Faiths (or three, counting our own inner evil, chattel slavery). Now the last impediment in our anointed path was gone. A universal humanity would be realized through 'globalization' and world democratic reform.

Then a new Dark Faith came to test our will and resolve. The events of 9/11 irretrievably mired America in another holy war with yet another universalist faith, appearing in the guise of its own Jihadist renewal. Here sacred narrative should have by all rights decreed a solemn repeat of national sacrifice and transcendence a la World War II. But this did not happen. Why it did not is still a mystery to most Americans. The reason this nation is no longer able to heed the Ram's horn call of sacred narrative is because this nation is undergoing its own metamorphosis.

Metousiosis [A change of essence and inner reality. How can we posit such a transfiguration of American identity? If the US represents a 'world faith' then how can our Americanism have been turned inside out? It began with the separation of the US military from the people.]

Separation. In 1973, a beleaguered Richard Nixon signed away the last vestige of universal military service, the infamous draft lottery, and instituted a new military regime in America: a professional service to be known as the All-Volunteer Force. What began as another policy desperation to escape the noose of defeat in Vietnam has since evolved into a separate and distinct world of American military and Defense societies.

For a while, in the easy-faux world of the 1990s, a separate but amazingly expert and perfect American professional military seemed to be just what was wanted: *Gods of War* as described in *World War Z*. But 9/11 fatefully torqued that trajectory.

America's Defense World is not simply the realm of professional soldiers. It is an infinitely complex interweaving of military societies, civilian Defense agencies, Defense contractors and a grand host of tribally related people. Defense World families are integral to its community, as are retired military who never retire. Related US government agencies literally operate with—and now within—the enormous enterprise of American national security as adjunct fellows. Because the Defense Department runs the whole show, the intelligence community, State Department, AID, DHS and others are being absorbed into the body. In cultural terms, this vast national security world is a federation of many subcultures; together they represent a kind of tribal confederacy.

Consider the Iroquois Confederacy, a league of six tribes that became a nation. Now imagine a seemingly infinite confederacy of Defense clans and tribes. But consider what this confederacy actually represents. The full Defense community presently approaches 30 million Americans, the remote posterity of Sparta's 300, as General Mattis (Commander of the US Central Command) calls them.

After 9/11, these 30 million have been accorded the ultimate honor as defenders of freedom. But after nine years of Iliadic

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war, with 6,000 dead (including Confederacy contractors) and 50,000 severe casualties (and tens of thousands more unacknowledged who suffer from PTSD or traumatic brain injury), the Tribal Confederacy now bears the sacrifice once borne collectively by all.

The Other. How has the 9/11 War altered the inner essence of the Tribal Confederacy and America? It began on that crystalline morning, September 11, 2001, framed for us by 19 Muslim men. Their astonishing act of raw theater surpassed Pearl Harbor.

Sociologists have a wonderful construct called *status inconsistency*, where a person's status is higher in one social dimension but lower in another. We can apply this to our own expectations of the enemy when we encounter a very lowly evil that nonetheless strikes us with great power. For example, how could the vermin Lee Harvey Oswald have brought down the stainless glory of Camelot? How could a few primitive 'towel-heads' have pulled off 9/11? Americans were frustrated after 9/11 by the very fact that 'evil' was not commensurate with our own grandeur. Remember that our sacred war narrative demands a properly grand evil. Think back to 1950s pop songs like "Ahab the Arab" and recall our racist contempt and condescension. Simply, Al Qaeda was not the Third Reich, and nothing could make it so.

Thus, almost instantly (with deliberate boosts from certain Washington lobbies) the true evil became Islam. Only a war against an equal '-ism' could renew the sacred war *geas* of World War II. In Irish mythology, a *geas* is an obligatory spell and its charge must never be broken. We could not violate the charge, yet we were unable to directly declare war on Islam. Hence, we sought out changeling words like 'terrorism' and 'violent extremism.' But in our hearts we said different things. *We needed a big evil even if we could not say its name.*

The war was supposed to be *World War II: The Sequel*, global in its scope and its goals. We were again setting out to redeem humanity, although this time the downtrodden and benighted humanity was Islam and we were going to bring freedom and democracy to their world.

Muslims saw these as code words of religious conversion, which, in fact, they were. That Americans did not see this cannot null or wish away Muslim perception. Muslims readily understood that to bring the American Way to Islam would mean eviscerating the entire edifice of Muslim life, replacing it with American consciousness. Polling of Muslim societies have consistently shown how hundreds of millions see it this way.

The Muslim reaction of sweeping hatred only entrenched our conviction that we were fighting a misbegotten slice of humanity that must be converted (redeemed) before the 'terrorist threat' would go away. The most popular term-of-art in the Pentagon after 9/11 was 'draining the swamp.' This metaphor spoke to traditional American holy war imagery, where the *Other* was demonic

(Nazis), subhuman (Japanese) or a form of disease or bacteria as our imagery of Islam. The swamp is the Muslim world itself, breeding ground of bacteria, and indistinguishable from the disease carriers that breed in it.

The idea of the bacterial *Other* encouraged draconian solutions to control the perceived epidemic. After 9/11, many senior military officers shared this confidence with me: "The time may come when we have to kill millions of Muslims."

War rhetoric bore this out. Islam was savage and primitive (as in the way they treat women), a failed civilization. The only way Muslims could demonstrate their worthiness was to submit to us and profess their profound regret for all armed resistance to the West. But submission to Western colonialism is exactly what Muslims have been fighting for 200 years.

Nine Iliadic years of war has in no way diminished our construction of good vs. evil, of 'truth, justice, and the American Way' vs. a tainted and corrupt civilization. The events of 9/11 instantly solidified an American conviction of the *Other*—the alien, the stranger—just as we had once viewed Nazism and Soviet Communism. Check out the angry 'ground zero mosque' rhetoric—where Islam itself is the bacterium infecting America.

The Republican establishment today has no difficulty confusing American Muslims who are loyal citizens with actual terrorists. We cannot let go of sacred war ritual as good vs. evil, even if this means fighting those very identities our ethos once charged us to support.

Forever War. It was not just the enemy that tested us after 9/11. How were we to reclaim the mantle of World War II without the ritual arena of great battle? Our sacred narrative depends on existential contests in which a divine hand ensures American eternal victory. Facing an unworthy foe and deprived of the testing and transcendence of great battle, how were we to proceed?

We first tried to manufacture another theater of eternal victory in the battle we called Operation Iraqi Freedom. Yet the real battle began after the victory curtain came down. Fighting improvised explosive devices and suicide bombers brought endless casualties of war without any glory. Suddenly we needed another sacred war venue.

We found this in a changeling package called The Long War, our new palette for exchanging scale of battle for grandeur of duration and global scope. The Long War took the hallowed tradition of Sacred Battle and turned instead into epochal enterprise—a grand religious conversion project directed at pariah states like Iran and Syria and maybe Pakistan, yet lifting not a finger against friendly tyrannies like Egypt and Saudi Arabia. Moreover, this grand enterprise was to be run by the Tribal Confederacy. Nine years later, it is officially run by the whole of government—although in practice this really means no more than absorbing smaller government agencies like AID, the State Department and

the Coast Guard, Borg-like, into the great body of the Confederacy. Establishing grandeur (sacredness) through scope (global) and duration (Long War) and low-intensity-but-constant combat has enabled the Tribal Confederacy to run the whole show in the name of the nation. Over time, the advantages this offers the Confederacy can only be reinforced. The proper role of non-military (AKA 'shopping') America is simply to act as reflexive, unthinking boosters, marking the passage to full citizen passivity. Hence, *Support Our Troops!* has come to resemble less an authentic outpouring than the sort of coercive motivation that puts local police stickers on civilian bumpers.

This *metousiosis* represents an even more satisfying changeling to the Cold War. The Cold War's goal was to infinitely postpone battle while warning it could also happen at any time, thus creating a paradigm of deterrence that naturally reinforced our vast Tribal Confederacy. In contrast, the Global War on Terror made the act of enjoining combat on a global scale—where literally everything we value as Americans is at risk and under threat—a different yet equally effective path to the same end. But unlike the Cold War, the Confederacy is now charged with doing it all.

Intercessor Power. In World War II, 12 million American citizens conquered the planet. (Remember that even the Bolsheviks were our allies and much of their military might was a gift from us!) Americans who had never been on a ship or plane or even seen a passport were all suddenly countrymen of Ulysses, rowing together to distant Ilium. I know that for my father it was his great adventure, the odyssey of a lifetime.

World War II melded American identity, making the people victors together. Nine years of 9/11 War, in contrast, reveals a wide revetted moat between those who sacrifice and defend and passive America, the shopping people. Creating and then entrenching such a chasm, both of social status and identity itself, will have consequences over time. Even nine years is enough to show what is happening.

Sarah Palin declared in the 2008 presidential election campaign that servicemen and women are the 'true Americans.' And according to American canon, they irrefutably are. They do what the founders of our country intended all citizens to do: defend the republic. This most central requirement of citizenship has been so blithely discarded. Even more troubling is that they see themselves as the true Americans, and will tell you so. In 2007, I wrote what I thought was a breakthrough piece for *Military Review*. I showed it to a full-bird Army Colonel in charge of the Human Terrain effort. He came back with this razor-response: "*Have you served? Have you been to the war theater? Have you seen combat?*"

Yes, I had served. I had been to our current war theater (on Navy ships). But this in no way satisfied the steel-eyed colonel. I had not been in the line of fire, open to sacrifice. I was still one of those *other Americans*. Perhaps not quite a shopping American as enshrined by President Bush, but nonetheless an inferior American.

If my titular rights as a citizen were not in question, my right to criticize ongoing military operations was suspect. I should shut up.

This interaction speaks to our identity separation on the road to transfiguration. Over decades, the All-Volunteer Force did not simply encourage an alternative American community; it potentially spawned a new American nation.

Our new nation is a warrior nation that sees America's world relationships through soldier's eyes. Moreover, it subtly seeks out foreign relations with fellow military elites—and military solutions are integral and central to what it does. In a world that transfigured Americans accept as primarily threatening, they are at the mercy of a Tribal Confederacy that naturally and forever frames our world relationships in terms of threat. Hence, the whole world is at risk of drug lords and terrorists and failing states. Our allies exist to assist in the main national effort in support of US interests, and remember: "If you are not with us, then you are against us."

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The Enemy Within. Just as the Confederacy becomes less about

battle and more about law enforcement (protecting our interests and our laws), American domestic law enforcement societies have become more military. In the US today there are 22,000 SWAT (Special Weapons and Tactics) departments, each role-play aping the kick-ass, take-no-prisoners, stormtrooper attitude of the Confederacy at war.

The Defense Tribal Confederacy now thinks of itself as the planetary law enforcement agency, running a worldwide Gulag prison network. Because of mandatory sentencing, 'three strikes you're out,' and the criminalization of simple drug possession (especially marijuana) the United States has the most incarcerated society on earth: 22% of the world's imprisoned. Including those in the criminal justice system—meaning paroled, ankleted, halfway-housed—nearly 8 million Americans are controlled by the law enforcement punishment enterprise.

If you were to take all of those in the law enforcement/punishment system, including all police, prison guards, private security and all of those under the control of the criminal justice system—and their families—the total would equal if not surpass the Tribal Confederacy. More than 60 million Americans are somehow deeply connected to foreign and domestic enforcement and punishment: 1 out of every 5. This is very close to the DDR (East German) achievement of enforcement and control.

Legendary military historian Martin Van Creveld tells me that no modern society has made such an issue of criminalizing drugs. The result has been the destabilization of *Mesoamérica* and the Andean region through Ecuador. What has driven America to

strategic postures so self-destructive both at home and abroad? Simple Puritanism? The motivation is more complicated. The post-9/11 disease/bacteria metaphor of 'draining the swamp' resonates equally to American characterizations of the threat within. Illegal aliens, especially *Mesoamericanos*, have entered and are infecting the national body. After 9/11, this fear also encompassed terrorist bacilli crossing our inviolable borders.

There are also dangers posed by nefarious American citizens. This threat includes Muslim-Americans, an entire ethnic group under suspicion, and the threat of drug users who could poison the American body itself. Drug dealers, the *narcoprincipes*, become the evil carriers of disease and the prison system becomes a kind of isolation ward, quarantining the bacteria and keeping the national body pure. Paradoxically, the criminalizing of simple drug possession creates such conflict and turbulence among neighboring societies that we reach for familiar war mechanisms. Finally, the Long War has anointed the War on Drugs as real war. In the last nine years both wars have melded symbiotically because together they help underscore the larger threat of criminals and terrorists alike to the American 'Homeland.'

Doxology [A hymn of praise typically coming at the end of the Liturgy. Doxology speaks to how a transfigured America and its Defense Tribal Confederacy are finding ritual ways to celebrate altered identities.]

Isolationism as Absent

Presence. At dinner in the Red Barn restaurant in Westport, Connecticut, I noticed a couple at the next table. The woman was sipping her drink idly while a Blackberry transfixed her husband. They were two feet from each other across the table, but not a word was being spoken. He was simply not there. Present, but absent.

Today, the US has over 700 military bases worldwide, and is still deep into two wars. Yet its troopers live behind rings of HESCO barriers (history's first insta-walls: plastic and wire gabions that create bullet-and-grenade-proof forts within hours), living in sovereign American towns on foreign soil complete with Starbucks and Burger King, and never leaving the town unless in massive armored garbage trucks called MRAPs. Even in the backlands in isolated Forward Operating Bases there are still tiny islands of Americana in a sea of *Other*. Present, but absent.

Likewise absent, shopping America, freed from even the most vestigial civic obligations to what was once known as the common defense, seems eager to anoint true Americans as their chosen intercessors. However, they are not particularly eager to inform themselves of world affairs and the conduct of war prosecuted in their name. Furthermore, just as they uncritically accept media sound bite messages of Forever War, these Americans also buy into the government and media messages of 'world as threat.' Shopping America is definitely disinterested in the wretched of the earth that are even today the majority of humanity. Check the missing response to horrific flooding in Pakistan. Present on our TV screens, absent in our hearts.

An identity framework offered up by our killers has led to a changed national essence and a deeply transfigured inner spirit—and *we have embraced it*. All of the pieces that have gone into our *metousiosis*—the separation of military from civil society, reimagining the majority of humanity as the *Other*, a national acceptance of Forever War, a fear of enemies among our own—lead us to the same destination.

America—both shopping Americans and true Americans—now seeks as part of its collective spirit to remove itself from the very humanity that it had once pledged itself to redeem and that needs us the most. This represents a complete undoing of our original credo. Not only is this troubling, it threatens to fatefully corrupt our very sense of meaning and selfhood as Americans.

Redemption remains only as rhetoric accompanied by meager or empty rituals, like building schools in societies that we have trashed. Our 'aid' efforts only lead to grand social distortion, selectively enriching the very few and supporting the governance of the very corrupt. In fact, most of our aid worldwide is actually called 'security assistance,' meaning our guns and police

expertise to keep some of the world's most tyrannical states safe and secure.

A View to a Kill. Defense-Speak, the Tribal Confederacy's national language, likes to declare that counter insurgency and irregular challenges should be less 'kinetic'

and more about 'engagement.' Less about shooting and more about hugging. But the truth is that our military likes kinetics—it is what they do and it describes who they are. If the Tribal Confederacy defines America's relationship with the world there is going to be an ongoing, deep-rooted preference for kinetics. Yet as we have seen in Iraq, Afghanistan, Mogadishu and Yemen, kinetic relationships promote more conflict, and make us more certainly their Forever Enemy.

Yet it is so tempting—technology has made killing so easy. The entire kill-chain—from the discovery of a target to its identification to the joining of target and ordnance—can be accomplished now from a literal and emotional distance. Drone controllers—Air Force pilots in easy chairs operating near Las Vegas—can strike any place on earth. This means that the Confederacy as planetary police is now a vision within reach.

What would American world law enforcement look like? The 9/11 *metousiosis* means that American interests and security axiomatically come before those of humanity. Look at the PATRIOT Act, in which any person can be officially designated as a terrorist and the *US Government can sanction assassination even of American citizens*. There is no international legal constraint on the full exercise of American national interests. This revolutionary paradigm was championed by the Bush administration in its defense of preemptive war—a doctrine so damaging to our alliance relations that it dropped from view. Today, in contrast, we simply find more discreet mechanisms to get what we want.

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Moreover, Americans are detached and so willingly uninformed that there is no possibility of public outcry widespread enough to force accountability. The *WikiLeaks* incident reveals how Government has successfully established that truth in wartime is a crime to be severely punished. Freedom of speech and the right to know are now officially and absolutely subordinate to national security interests, *however the state chooses to define them*.

Celebrating Credo as we betray it. Why is this dark transfiguration not apparent to us? Why do our eyes not see? We are hobbled always at the outset of thought by our insistence that Americanism is not *religion*, let alone one of the world's great faiths, even as our sacred kings draw daily on language from an unreconstructed John Calvin. Like all world faiths, our truth to us is fundamentally true and beyond debate. Hence, 'freedom' and 'democracy' are just the way it was meant to be for all humanity, no questions please.

But what made Americanism so unstoppable in World War II and after was the authority of its integrity. *We are doing this for humanity, and to show you how committed we are, come what may, we will persevere however much sacrifice is asked of us.* And the whole world believed. Moreover, we made humanity come together through the United Nations from 1942 on. We meant it, and that really mattered.

Today, such archaic sentiments lie forever betrayed. Their remains cling to our lips as empty rhetoric. For too many decades the US has staked its reputation on the support of corrupt elites and tyrants, and has directly assisted in the persecution and breaking of those who resisted such oppression. This became the starkest hypocrisy in the 9/11 War. We exclaimed how we were fighting 'Jihadi-Salafist violent extremism' while maintaining the coziest relationships with the two Muslim states most committed to that extremist ideal: Saudi Arabia and Pakistan. Indeed, both states literally (as we know now) have blood on their hands for creating and assisting those who attacked us on 9/11. But allies they yet remain!

Failure and discontent in the 9/11 War led to a sort of rhetorical ruthlessness—in part to pacify domestic political constituencies, in part a necessary recalibration of grand strategy. In its breathless outset the bishops of the 9/11 war (known as NeoCons) enunciated open-ended, world-shaking goals in the mode of World War II: at a minimum, the transformation of the Middle East. Then there were the trumpeted color-revolutions: Orange, Purple, Green and Rose—also Tulip and Cedar. Democratic transformation was declared even as it was already failing in Ukraine, Georgia and Lebanon.

All this fanfare came to naught and the bitter fallback tells us much about our *metousiosis*. So we couldn't change the world, but we could still defend the homeland and 'kill them there so they don't kill us here.' We were trying to find ways to make the 9/11 War work for us and our identity was suddenly fungible in this high-stakes game. In the face of absolute failure to launch, we no

longer talked grandly of nation-building and democratic institutions. We had become tough realists: *Maybe these people aren't ready for democracy. We need to cover the bottom line, which is American security, so they don't come after us here.*

But the original American credo does not and cannot distinguish between realism and idealism. Realism is the practical path to realizing credo and fulfilling God's charge. Yet listen to the sounds of the Quadrennial Defense Review: "America does not have the option of abandoning a leadership role in support of its national interests. Those interests are vital to the security of the United States." If we talk credo, and then say as we do now openly, not even under our breath, that it's all about us 'looking out for Number One,' then our world-historical authority, not to mention our sacred identity, is toast.

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Anamnesis [*Literally, 'remembering forgetfulness,' anamnesis is captured in Christ's Eucharistic adjuration: "Do this in memory of me." Does America have a liturgical vehicle for remembering its former self?*]

Part One of this article (*America: Enemy of Change, Midwife of the Future*, published in *Kosmos Journal*, Spring|Summer 2010) sought to show how humanity has entered a time of transformation in which human consciousness itself is changing, suggesting the rise of new ideas, big ideas. As outlined here, we can see America heading in the exact opposite direction. Unlike the rest of humanity—including the European West—the US has become more inwardly focused, more parochial, more order-insistent and thus more punishment-resolved, and more fearful of the very humanity its original credo sought to redeem. Along the way, it has also become less democratic, less unified, less caring, and less emotionally connected, even in its surface rhetoric, from the nation it once had been: a people and a republic that once electrified the world with promise and hope.

In Part One I talked about what happened to Rome. The transformation of republic into imperial state created a great ruling institution that became the instrument of its own eventual undoing. Looking at a *metousiosis* so long ago, what we see is a Roman tribal confederacy—the *Res Publica*—that swapped its inner essence for an imperial state and its army. State/army instead of the people was a formula that worked. It was efficient and highly effective for centuries. But in the process state and army eagerly appropriated the sacred identity of the 'Roman Way.' *Romanitas* was theirs—*They possessed her*. But this new identity was shrunken and more

We live in a subsiding society facing earthly crisis—climate change—and a spiritual crisis—the loss of our mission to humanity. See it. Speak it. Fight it. What we do together, all of us, is our hope for tomorrow.

brittle than emperors could imagine. Rome exchanged a nation for a much smaller set of institutions. Are we any different today?

As world consciousness changed in the 3rd century, this state/army mutation of the Roman Way became increasingly out-of-touch and beleaguered. It charged down the road of fighting resistant identities and threats at all costs, making change itself a threat. It sought out its own graveyard. In its last centuries, Rome became the Dark Lord, and its victories, cruelly and at all costs seeking to hold back the new, were thus truly dark victories.

Our own American *metousiosis* or change of essence has mysterious resonance to the world of Late Antiquity. But can we remember forgetfulness? Our altered inner spirit is already transfiguring memory itself to fit our new national self—past wars replayed on the Military and History Channels are about battle rather than nation and TV-retelling of recent wars exalts the warrior of the Confederacy: *True American*. The Liturgy of the Word is still celebrated—as in *World War Z*—but not in the official US Government Mass, which emphasizes the sacrifice of its own that give their lives interceding for us, protecting the passive civilians of the homeland.

Hence, *anamnesis* is reworked so that what we remember is what we are given, not what was forgotten. This the way of cultural change: *You can't go home again*. Change of essence is change in collective consciousness. A very different America is confronting a transforming humanity in ways its ancestors would decry and deeply lament—but they can do nothing now. If we have forgotten who we were, then we, also like Late Romans, may have decided our future.

Postlude

Society makes up its mind. History is written by collective choice—by shifts in our consciousness. Leaders may believe in their decisions but only the people can embrace them. Hence, the Kaiser and his cronies may have initiated Germany's fateful course to *weltmacht* after 1890, but it was the enthusiasm of the new empire's people that made it so. America's transfiguration today—and its path of aggressive insecurity—has been ratified by the nation. Like Germany and so many others, once we commit to such a path, changing course is unlikely. Once the nation's path becomes coterminous with its own identity it simply cannot be given up. Then, like Rome, we set ourselves up truly as the *Enemy of Change, Midwife of the Future*. Over time, we will become the past. We will not like this outcome but it may not be so bad, at least in the eyes of our 'remote posterity' as they write tomorrow's histories of the United States. Like Rome, our ideas, our myths, our cultural legacies will live on among those who succeed us. But be assured the path we are on leads ineluctably not to the fulfillment of America's original divine mission, but rather to the emergence of a successor civilization—that is *not us*. Is there another path?

Society can also change. There are even surprising transformations. We remember our own dramatic shift from cowering republic to world redeemer, happening almost instantly. But returning to the early 1940s recursively takes us forward to our own parables of today. *World War Z* tells us that only a challenge surpassing the evil of Nazism could reawaken and renew the American nation. Yet just such a challenge looms—of severe planetary changes and their human consequences. American sacred narrative is now so mutilated and polluted that it comes close to recreating the Dark Side it once fought against. Therefore, planetary threats like climate change should seem like divine gifts: a quest so great that it will make us great again. But the questions of 2010 are not the questions of 1940 when the nation's narrative of struggle, sacrifice and transcendence had matured in the crisis of the Great Depression and could be transported seamlessly to the world stage. Today a society divided, adrift, self-serving, inward-looking, anxious, narcissistic and afraid, has no coherent story to tell itself of its own future. Those in the Defense Confederacy who should help lead the way as they did in 1940 are instead locked deep in their mythic sagas of Forever War and they no longer know how to talk to once fellow-countrymen.

Leaving the grand space of the cathedral and emerging into harsh light, we need to focus as others before us have in dark times. We live in a subsiding society facing earthly crisis—*climate change*—and a spiritual crisis—*the loss of our mission to humanity*. See it. Speak it. Fight it. What we do together, all of us, is our hope for tomorrow.

Michael Vlahos, PhD, is Professor of Strategy at the United States Naval War College. He is the author of *Fighting Identity: Sacred War and World Change*, a 'take no prisoners' analysis of how war—as culture's core ritual—has shaped national identity in the modern world. Vlahos, a graduate of Yale and the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, began his career in the CIA. In the 1980s he was Co-Director of Security Studies at Johns Hopkins SAIS, and then the Director of the State Department's Center for the Study of Foreign Affairs, where starting from a judgment in 1986 he risked all by declaring in advance the fall of the Soviet Union. After the fall he became one of the first Internet pioneers, and in a prescient article in 1997 for *Washington Quarterly* he forecast how anti-modern non-state groups would use our network technologies to attack the world order. An historian of war who sees human conflict through the prism of the anthropologist, Vlahos believes that the ritual frameworks we cherish—especially sacred war—represent perhaps our most important window into what it means to be human.

