

The More Things Change....

...the more they stay the same. We've all heard it a thousand times in reference to everything from the weather to politics and from sports to business. We've had the same debate over health care for over forty years. We still discuss permissive vs. restrictive parenting and the rich still get richer while the poor head in the other direction. It's been true for a long time maybe forever.

Where this is going is the following statement: 'Our Country is run by rich folks, almost all of them white and almost all of them men.' Rich is the most important word in that statement and any modifier pertaining to it is just that, a modifier. The modifiers shade the meaning of "rich" as in, "Which rich person are you talking about?" but the core of the issue, the point I want to make, is that it is rich people who run the show.

Why, you might ask, has this columnist decided to write about the obvious, now? Well, it's been brewing for a while. What with the Bank Bailouts (which I supported) and the Senate Millionaires List and the influence of Washington's Lobbyists and the clout of Corporate Dollars it's a wonder that I don't mention it every week. We're kind of surrounded by the evidence supporting the premise, don't you think? But I've never liked a writer who whines and especially one who whines about the obvious. There's nothing more tedious than the Old Lefty Progressive who goes on and on about financial conspiracies and the evils of money. I have listened to so many of them that I try hard not to be one.

No it's not current events in particular that compel me to bring up the topic of rich folks and their lopsided influence. It's reading. Over the course of this past year I have read several excellent works, histories and biographies, about the men we call the Founding Fathers. I have been drawn to the history of our Independence and the culture surrounding it since I was a child. And for some reason this year, my sixtieth on the planet, has brought renewed fervor for the subject. I have studied Washington, Adams (both kinds) Jefferson, Hamilton, Franklin and Madison in some depth and with great pleasure. They were all fascinating people. Some more than others stand out for me as a sort of "culture hero", Franklin at the top of the list.

What these great men wrought was a monumentally significant nation filled with new ideas and a vitality that exploded on the world. They succeeded at a task, revolution, which has in too many other places and times led to nothing but deepened misery and ritual murder. The French Revolution, close on the heels of ours, was an insane bloodbath ultimately resulting in Napoleon, only to be followed by more Kings. The revolution in Russia early in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century was intended to establish a dictatorship of the working class and succeeded in creating a dictatorship of The Party ably led by that most enduring of mass-murderers Josef Stalin.

So I am not at all going to say that the Founders weren't special, even amazing. What I will say is that their vision was one wherein the country is run exclusively by landed, wealthy, white men. They never thought to apologize for this. It was nowhere in their minds to think of this exclusionary model as less than righteous. Oh they made statements about the evils of Slavery, Jefferson most eloquently. But he, in particular, was great at saying noble things while being quietly resigned to maintaining the status quo.

Not one of the Founders ever considered a place for women in the ruling class. This was entirely in keeping with contemporary culture where women did not figure in power equations at all.

Not one of them believed in complete, direct Democracy. That is to say that the direct election of the President and Representatives was not an idea that appealed to them and most of them wrote lucidly about the dangers of "the common man's vote". That's why they created the Electoral College whose Electors used to be much more at liberty to vote for whomever they chose. It was a safeguard against the popular vote and an open invitation for the powerful and connected to influence an election.

Senators were chosen by a State's House, members of which were sometimes elected by landed white men and sometimes appointed by the Governor. It was a variation on the House of Lords in the Motherland. It was no accident that the most powerful men in the country's legislature were not elected by "the people".

Which brings me to "We the people....." The Declaration was a truly brilliant document and the Constitution that followed years later was even more important in a nuts and bolts sense. But in those early days "the people" were white guys with money. It was true in Europe before America and it is true in America long after the Founders' passing. We have indeed modified the picture. One person, one vote is a reality (only after the Civil Rights legislation of the 60's). Women do indeed hold high office and sit on Corporate Boards but I invite you to peruse a list of business power centers and compute the gender imbalance for yourself. And if you have any doubt about the place of money, finance and banking in the influence peddling race just take a look at the billions involved in National Elections.

Let me know the next time that YOU cut can loose a million or two to influence your favorite representative. I'll do the same.