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Vol. 2

"All the other alternative facts you need to know"



TO THE STUDENTS: THIS ONE'S FOR YOU

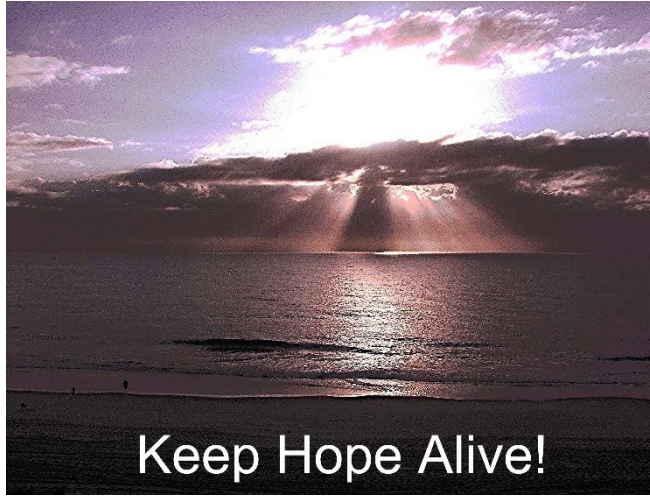
ABOUT TODAY . . .

April 4, 2018

WASHINGTON, DC

Armed Freedom

"Fifty years ago . . ." When you're in high school, it's often hard to relate to something that long ago. It's ancient history, before the Internet, You Tube, selfies. It's what your parents and grandparents yammer on about as you roll your eyes. And who can blame you? Geezers.



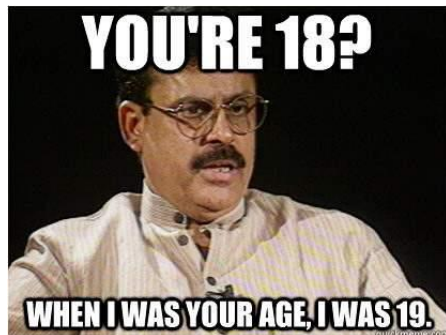
Keep Hope Alive!

and it was - it was a bit like the ancient Hebrew custom of tearing one's own clothing as a sign of mourning when truth had been destroyed.

King had spoken words and mobilized others to take actions along with him, all of which exposed the ugly truth of American racism, bigotry, and hate. When he was killed by a white man's bullet, many people, both black and white, felt quite hopeless.

Many who had marched in the streets "tuned-in, turned-on (to pot), and dropped out." They became the Boomers: your parents' generation. A lot of them never returned to the struggle that had once animated them. They'd lost hope.

Many of you, often well-off and white, have joined with African Americans, Latinos and a whole rainbow coalition of your generation to speak, mobilize and act in order to *finally* get Congress and other lawmakers to act against unrestrained access to the weapons of war which have been used against you in your schools, and daily against so many others. You are providing all of us with a heartening and visible reason to take hope - that the long struggle we've also waged against violence from guns, racism, and bigotry isn't lost. You're claiming it as yours as well. So, it's now ours together. *Welcome!*



And yet. Even though history may not repeat itself so much as rhyme, unless we want to keep on being stupefied by its incessant, tragic rhyming, we'd all do well to learn what we can from it.

So again . . . fifty years ago today, Martin Luther King, Jr. was assassinated. Many responded to the hopelessness they felt by burning down their own communities. Strange and self-defeating though this seems -



But here's a scary question: will you, also, lose hope? Will you lose hope if Congress and other lawmakers do little or nothing . . . when the NRA slimes you and your leaders, and the President backtracks on his initial support of your goals? Will you, too, grow weary and drop out?

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Without hope, nothing changes. The first Star Wars movie was later subtitled “Episode IV: A New Hope.” In *Rogue One*, the Resistance doesn’t yet destroy the Death Star. So, when Andor tells Jyn, “Rebellions are built on hope,” he’s referring to a “brand



of hope that is defined by a willingness to fight for a future they may never get to see. The moral of ‘Rogue One’ is that the fight for what’s right is bigger than any one person, and we must all be prepared to make sacrifices for hope to endure.”¹

That was a great story, as is “Episode VIII: The Last Jedi.” But just *how* do you keep from losing hope from the narrative flow of *your own* story?

To discover and hold onto hope, it helps to live out *our* stories against the backdrop of *a much larger story* - a story of mythic proportions. Myths, consciously or otherwise, are stories to live by. Myths might or might not contain actual history: they’re meant to be understood in a metaphorical way. *Star Wars* is a *great* example of a contemporary myth. It can inform, inspire, orient, and remind those who “buy into” it. It’s a good backdrop for living your own story.

¹ Sean Patrick Monahan in BustedHalo.com

There are others, and *some come from religion*. Say what? Yep! One way to approach the sacred stories of any religion is to take them seriously but not literally. That is, in addition to wondering about their historicity, to ask what their metaphoric or mythic meaning might be. Again, “mythic” doesn’t imply that they’re bogus. Far from it. It means that sometimes mere history is insufficient to hold the deeper meanings.

So, how are you going to hold onto hope? If you’re Jewish, you might look at the mythic dimensions of Judaism’s dominant story: the Hebrew people’s Exodus from Egypt and their wandering in the wilderness for forty years. (Hint: in the Bible, the number 40 usually refers to a time of testing and trial in which identity and purpose are discovered.)

The metaphors of that mythic story gave hope to generations of African American slaves and, after their emancipation, to the long struggle for civil rights that is still going on. It’s easy to identify the modern pharaoh: the slaveowner, the white power structure, politicians then and now. Not a bad backdrop story to inspire and energize your own hopeful story.

If you’re Christian, you might not only use the Exodus story, but also some of the stories of the early Christians who were accused of “turning the world upside down.”²

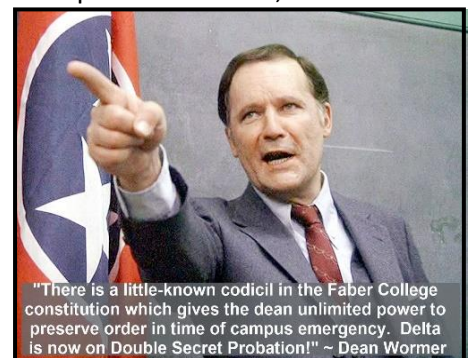
² For example, see Acts 17. A bible version called *The Message* has a particularly good rendering: “These people are out to destroy the world, and now they’ve shown up on our doorstep, attacking everything we hold dear!”

If you protest the *status quo*, that’s exactly the sort of pushback you will often get. Again, these are intriguing and useful larger stories to infuse *your* story with energy and hope.

These Jewish and Christian backdrop stories share in the underlying belief that God is working out God’s purposes in human history and doing that through the actions of people. You might choose to imagine God as a supreme being. Others of you might not have any mental furniture for that notion of God to sit down in. Instead, you might imagine God to be (in the words of a new hymn) “the ‘Presence’ and ‘Surrounding’ . . . the ever wondrous ‘More’” that is beyond all words to define. Whatever your theological taste, it is a hopeful notion that we are not alone in our struggles to keep our schools, streets, and homes safe from the violence of firearms; and to lessen the violence of racism and bigotry directed toward the outsider.

Make no mistake about it: you’re going to have to work hard to keep your hope alive. Also, hope, by itself, is not a strategy. You’ll need that too.

Let’s change gears now and *have some fun* as we strategize. We turn to the wit and wisdom of National Lampoon’s 1978 film, *Animal House*.



“There is a little-known codicil in the Faber College constitution which gives the dean unlimited power to preserve order in time of campus emergency. Delta is now on Double Secret Probation!” ~ Dean Wormer

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A refresher on the plot: Delta Tau Chi is “the worst fraternity” on the Faber College campus. They’re a bunch of debauched partiers and, to put it charitably, low performers. Naturally, they run afoul of Faber’s administration, headed by the authoritarian Dean Wormer, who vows to kick them off campus. Wormer turns to “a codicil in Faber’s constitution” which gives him the *unlimited power in times of emergency* to impose Double Secret Probation. *(Italics added.)*

I can’t help but note that ever-more-authoritarian President Trump keeps looking for such things (“codicils”) to give him legal cover while he pursues extreme measures against his enemies *du jour* . . . frequently people of color and the marginalized.

When their alcohol use is discovered



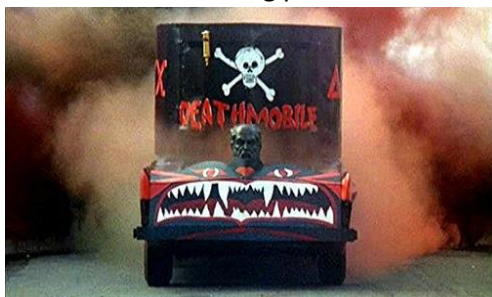
at a raucous Toga Party while on Double Secret Probation, Wormer has the pretext he needs to kick them out. A pall of depression settles over the fraternity. “War’s over, man,” one of them observes. Bluto, the character hilariously played by the sadly late John Belushi, then says:

“What? Over? Did you say “over”? *Nothing* is over until *we* decide it is! Was it over when the Germans bombed Pearl Harbor? Hell no! And it ain't over now. 'Cause when the goin' gets tough . . . the tough get goin'! C'mon!”

After more pithy comments from Bluto the brothers still don’t move. So, another fraternity member, Otter, stands up and says:

“Bluto's right. Psychotic, but absolutely right. We gotta take these bastards. Now, we could fight 'em with conventional weapons. That could take years and cost millions of lives. Oh no. No, in this case, I think we have to go all out. *I think that this situation absolutely requires a really futile and stupid gesture be done on somebody's part.*” *(Italics added.)*

This energizes the fraternity and they do, indeed, execute a superbly planned “futile and stupid gesture” that hilariously wreaks havoc on the annual homecoming parade.



After the film’s last scene, a series of upward-crawling captions reveals what happens to the brothers after graduation. (The reversals of their fortunes would have pleased Jesus, since he was always saying that “the first will be last,” the exulted will be brought low, and such.) Here are two examples: John “Bluto” Blutarsky marries and becomes a U. S. Senator; and the tyrannical student ROTC commander, Doug Niedermeyer, is killed in Vietnam by his own troops.

“And *this* suggests something about our strategy?” you may be asking. Sure! The “conventional weapons”

of violently returning hate speech for hate speech, violence for violence, *would actually take longer* and exact too great a toll, since it would only continue the seemingly endless, vicious cycle we’re already in.

What we need is *an absurd strategy*: something others might well regard as “really futile and stupid”: something like the non-violent resistance strategies of Ghandi, Jesus and King.

When Jesus said (Matthew 5:39), “If someone slaps you on the *right* cheek, turn the other cheek toward him,” he wasn’t advising his followers to let others beat them up. These are, instead, very specific instructions to his followers on how to *resist non-violently*. Here’s the background.

If a usually-right-handed Roman soldier struck an equal with their right fist, it would make contact with the left side of the face. If they struck an “inferior” person, they swung with the back of their right hand making contact with the right cheek. Roman culture, much as our own, made clear distinctions between races and classes, so the soldiers backhanded their subjects to make a point. As Jews, Jesus and his followers were second-class. No one thought twice about the rightness of treating “inferiors” with less respect. So, Jesus taught his followers to stand up and require the soldiers to treat them *as they would their equals!* This strategy might even make their attackers think about how they were mistreating another human being.³

³ See Paul Penley at ReenactingTheWay.com. His view in this paragraph follows that of the New Testament scholar, Walter Wink in his book, *Taking on the Powers*.

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Here's an example of how this "futile and stupid gesture" might work. When you're insulted to your face or on social media, you could consider responding with *curiosity* rather than a snappy back-at-ya insult. "What is it that you get out of making a hurtful comment like that to me?"

If they come back with, "Well, you deserve it, you *^&\$%#!," you could respond, "I'm curious: tell me more about why that's so." The goal is to get them out of their reactive, emotional brain and engage their thinking brain. Only then can a bridge be built.

Of course, to do this, *you* have to keep your own cool first! That takes training and practice - but practicing some form of meditation that works for you can help to keep you calm.

Also, remember those far bigger, mythic stories! Even Darth Vader was a Jedi! It's just that he'd fallen into the Dark Side of the Force. And, Christians and Jews each believe that *all* people are made in the image of a loving and compassionate God . . . that this is their *true* identity which they may have forgotten, or else need to discover for the first time.

Those are just a few of the sort of strategies you'll need alongside of your hope.

There's just one more thing: this is going to be a *long struggle*. Here's some wisdom from a very cool, influential, and realistic preacher who died three years after King did:

"Nothing that is worth doing can be achieved in our lifetime; therefore, we must be saved by hope.

"Nothing which is true or beautiful or good makes complete sense in any immediate context of history; therefore, we must be saved by faith.

"Nothing we do, however virtuous, can be accomplished alone; therefore, we must be saved by love.

"No virtuous act is quite as virtuous from the standpoint of our friend or foe as it is from our standpoint. Therefore, we must be saved by the final form of love which is forgiveness."⁴

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SPEAKING OF STRATEGIES, THIS IS A REAL SPICY ONE

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Bill Penzey (*right*) runs

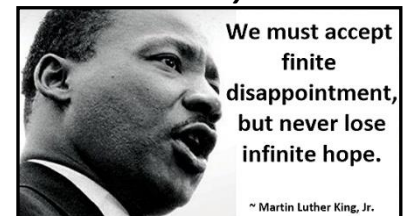


a nation-wide spice company out of Wauwatosa, Wisconsin, a suburb of Milwaukee. When Trump was elected president, Bill Penzey started posting articles about the meaning of Trump's presidency and how Cooks (he always capitalizes it) can make good things happen between people. He's not a fan of "The Donald" and his company has taken much heat for his critical views. He's even found clever ways to couple his products with his piquant commentary: such as the one offering a spice *for free* – all this aimed at Trump's animus against Mexican immigrants (*above right*)!



Bill Penzey's post today says, in part: "For Penzeys, April 4, 2018 just doesn't seem like a day for business as normal, so we are giving our people a paid day off and closing our stores and call center for the day. . . . In a time where the same forces that took Dr. King have re-emerged to take control of the highest offices in our country, this just does not seem like the year to look the other way. . . . If there's any silver lining to today's racism, it's that those with power and privilege who choose to fan the flames of racism know they can no longer do it openly. . . . These days, at least for now, it's those promoting racism that realize their need for discretion, because they know that so many would see their views as monstrous, especially the young. . . . I look at the recent student-led activism in the wake of the Marjory Stoneman Douglas shooting and see in the leadership of this new generation so much hope for the future."

Kudos to this entrepreneur who knows, along with Gandhi, that one of the seven social sins⁵ is commerce without morality. He's a hopeful leader. ***And so are you!***



⁴ Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Irony of American History*. President Barack Obama often said he found Niebuhr's writings very helpful.

⁵ Find more about Gandhi's Seven Social Sins at: en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Seven_Social_Sins