

This paper is one of a series of individual essays written within the conceptual constraints provided by "Forums for a Future." The collection of essays will become the individual episodes of the podcast.

'... Forums for A Future...'

Podcast (#9) The Wealth of Beliefs and Power

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Prelude

Part I of the series contained a brief 2-minute promotional and a conceptual foundation for thinking about change as the convergence of economic, political, social and personal perspectives. Part II was a set of four podcasts that provided a philosophy for the 21st century. Part III contains three lessons from modern history for informing the present, and for deriving their prescriptive implications for the future. Today, in Podcast # 9, I will discuss the second of these three lessons, the "Wealth of Beliefs and Power."

Key Concept

The key concept is that Wealth is achieved through the use of excessive Power justified by a Belief system that provides an ethical rationalization.

Introduction

Today's podcast has three parts. They illustrate the operation of the key concept that wealth is a derivative of power and belief in the historical context of the discovery and development of the New World. In 1492 Columbus landed in the New World. The impact of the Old World on the New World is less than 600 years old, so the final story is far from complete. But this short period of modern history already contains three lessons illustrating how wealth is a derivative of power and beliefs. The three parts are:

1. Surviving Columbus. This is an historical example of the concept.
2. Manifest Destiny. This is an illustration of the concept through the emergence of the United States as a nation and a world power.
3. The New American Century. This is a current implementation of the concept as it affects the present and our future.

1. Surviving Columbus ¹

The Spaniards believed they had a divine mission to conquer the world. The Spanish throne authorized discovery and exploration to find new lands and new people to bring into the true faith of Christianity. The indigenous people who were thus "discovered" were offered the choice of either the obedience of submitting to Christianity, and paying tribute to the authority of

Spanish rule and the Catholic Church, or to be treated as defiant resisters and subjected to punishment, captive labor or death.

The Dominican Republic.

When Columbus arrived in the New World, what is now the Dominican Republic was inhabited by about one-half million people with a history of having lived successfully on the Island for 5,000 years. Unfortunately, for them, they had gold. They were conquered, forced to work as slaves and infected with smallpox. Only 27 years later, after the smallpox epidemic of 1519, the population was reduced to 3,000. After the conquest, the Spaniards imported slaves from Africa to supplement the declining native population, and, by 1520, had developed sugar plantations to make it a rich colony for Spain for much of the 16th century. This, however, was only a small-scale preview of the Spanish conquest to follow of the far richer Inca and Aztec societies of Peru and Mexico.²

Mexico.³

Herán Cortez arrived in Mexico City, the capital of the Aztec Empire, on November 8, 1519. The Aztec Emperor, Montezuma, as the Spaniards called him, believed Cortez was an ancient God, from a time before the Aztec Empire was formed. The ancient God had sailed away over the ocean, but had promised to return in the year that Cortez actually arrived. As a once and future king, Cortez was allowed entry into Mexico City and given lodging in a Royal Palace.

The Spaniards could not believe what they saw. Mexico City was a modern city, with wide canals, shining walls, a huge market, and an aqueduct system for supplying freshwater to what was probably the sixth largest city of the world at that time. The Spaniards were dazzled by the gold in the jewelry and the decorations of the Aztec Palaces.

Under a false pretext Montezuma was eventually seized by Cortez and forced to sign papers making him obedient to the king of Spain. As a ransom, in exchange for his life, he permitted Cortez to strip the gold from the Royal Palaces and for it to be melted into gold bricks. The shares of this "tribute" were split among Cortez, the King, and other Spaniards, and a statue of the Virgin Mary was constructed at the site of a holy Aztec Temple.

Again, under false pretenses, the Spaniards murdered a large group of unarmed Mexican soldiers during a fiesta to consolidate their power. They then killed Montezuma when he was unable to quell the growing popular resistance. Eventually, the Spaniards were overwhelmed by the sheer numbers of Aztecs, only about one-fourth of them escaping alive from the popular Aztec uprising. But, by then, a smallpox epidemic had begun to devastate the Aztec Empire. More than half of the Indian population died and the Aztec political structures were shattered. Cortez, re-supplied with new forces, returned; on August 13, 1521 Mexico City was conquered and razed, 4/5 of the Aztec defenders murdered, and the rest branded into slavery.

By 1524 Franciscan missionaries arrived, and the surviving Aztec Indians were baptized into the Christian faith. The Church of Our Lady of Guadalupe was completed with forced labor by 1531 on the site of the most sacred Aztec Temple, and a cultural transformation enforced. By 1550, all

Indian people were to learn Spanish and become acculturated. Thus began the establishment of New Spain and the subjugation of the indigenous people for 300 years.

The Requirement

All Spanish conquistadors were bound by the king of Spain to read “The Requirement” to all foreign people, in order to give them a chance to submit, before attacking them. The Requirement was intended "to remove the stain of innocent blood from the Spanish King's soul. It informed foreign powers their lands had been donated to Spain in 1493 by Pope Alexander VI. Thus, as an agent of the one true God, the conquistadors gave indigenous people the opportunity to submit to the obedience of the Pope and the King of Spain. If they did not, that they would be forcefully subjugated to the yoke and obedience of The Church and his Majesty, that women and children would be made slaves and that the death and destruction to follow would be of their own choice. The divine charge of the conquistadors was to discover new lands and to offer new people their salvation through Christianity.⁴

US Southwest⁵

Coronado extended the Spanish influence into the United States in 1540 by claiming the area for Spain. By 1598 the Pueblo Indians had been conquered and offered the choice of either obedience to and acceptance of Christianity, or of being considered defiant and subjected to punishment, slavery or death. The military conquest was followed by priests who, by the mid-1600s, built Roman Catholic missions and collected “tributes” in the form of labor and goods for the King and the Church.

To be conquered and subjected to the yoke of Christianity was to gain the privilege of poverty. The magnitude of the poverty and oppression was so great that in 1680 the Pueblo Revolt, led by Pueblo Indians with traditional spiritual beliefs, drove out the priests and the Spanish authority. The mission's were destroyed and the old native spiritual life restored until the reconquest by Spain in 1693. The indigenous people of the Southwest lived under colonial influence of Spain, and then Mexico, for the next century until the Spanish authority collided with the westward expansion of the United States.

2. Manifest Destiny

The Louisiana Purchase in 1803 opened the gates for Western expansion in the United States. The Santa Fe Trail first became a trade route with Mexico, and later, the path for the annexation of Texas and the Southwest as a result of the war with Mexico in 1846. The Western expansion was driven by the ideology that it was the destiny of the US to take over the Continent for the development of the new political invention of democracy, combined with the emerging energy of industrialization. This was the beginning of the modern definition of human progress. The focus of this new definition of human progress was to shift the view from its roots in the Church, to one of secular nationalism.

The arrival of the railroad in Santa Fe in 1879 exemplified this new definition of what was good, and therefore what was in the best interests of human kind, which included the Spanish and

Indians who were currently on the land. Once again, they were offered a new "choice," this time of either joining in the spirit of the Manifest Destiny of America, or to be pushed aside and punished for resisting what was obviously human progress for the common good.

The Trail of Tears ⁶

The great American experiment of the merger of Democratic self-government with capitalism, driven by the new emerging industrial age (rather than by the Church and fate), ensured an outcome for the American Indian similar to what the Aztecs experienced. Although the time frame was several centuries later, and the ideology was different, the process was the same. Power and belief conspired to transfer the wealth of the land from the indigenous people to fuel the growth and the emergence of the United States as the most powerful nation in the world.

The Cherokee Nation occupied much of what is now the southeast United States during the Spanish conquest of Central and South America. They withstood the early Spanish intrusions in the 1540's when Hernando de Soto established Spanish control over Florida. For the next 200 years the Cherokee nation traded with the white British enclaves on the East Coast, and served as a buffer between them and the French on the west. This permitted the Cherokee to live in a mutually dependent balance of power with the British. However, in 1738 a British slave ship brought smallpox with the trading goods, and in a few years one-half of the Cherokee Nation died from the plague. When the British defeated the French in 1763 to gain control of North America, the British had little need for the now depleted Cherokee Nation.

During this period, England had declining control over the governance of the American colonies, as the frontiers were pushing steadily westward. The treaties with the Cherokee Nation, to give them sovereign control over their lands, were in a constant state of renegotiation as they were continuously displaced by European settlers. After American independence, the fate of the American Indians fell into the hands to the new US Government. Indian self-determination was in direct opposition to the ideology of the Manifest Destiny of the new nation. As Ronald Wright writes:

"...moving the border did nothing to stop encroachment. Daniel Boone brought swarms of settlers... deep inside the Cherokee Nation's heartland... they wore Buckskin, ate dried meat, grew maize, took Indian women... wore out the soil (and) exterminated the game... Like the conquistadors, they left a ruined country in their wake. (p.112)"

In 1830 Congress pass the "Removal Act" authorizing the resettlement, against their will, of the Cherokee Nation, who by now were concentrated on Federally controlled land in Georgia. In 1838 Federal Troops rounded up the approximately 10,000 individuals remaining of the Cherokee Nation and marched them in "a trail of tears" to new lands in Oklahoma. Approximately 4,000 individuals died in the process.

The New Inflection Point

"Manifest Destiny" as a belief system was a smooth transition from "Surviving Columbus," requiring only the substitution of the few words. Thus, the Modern Age of science and

technology began with Manifest Destiny and lasted until the end of the Cold War with the triumph of Democratic capitalism over Communism. But, it was only a continuation of the previous Spanish pursuit of wealth through power and belief, but this time in the service of the Modern Era of Nation building through industrialization. “Manifest Destiny” has now been replaced by the doctrine for a “New American Century” which is a similar misguided effort by the United States to claim leadership for the new Post-Modern Era we are entering.

The New American Century

The Project for a New American Century⁷ is an ideology created largely by the neoconservative Republicans under the Presidency of George Bush. The objective of this ideology is to make the United States the sole world power. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the strategic goal was to ensure that no other nation could challenge the authority of the US, and to make it clear to the rest of the world that the United States would take unilateral action to protect its global interests. The Project for the New American Century is based on the premise that what is good for the US, and in particular the global expansion of Democratic capitalism, is good for the world. It is a foreign-policy imbued with the same moral certainty that defined the Spanish Conquest and Manifest Destiny before it. But now, it is a global enterprise devoted to the accumulation of wealth through unlimited economic growth enforced through US military power.

To implement this global ideology, it was necessary to undermine the authority of the United Nations, and as Gwynne Dyer notes to:

“...establish an unchallengeable nuclear superiority, restructure the Air Force toward a global first-strike force, deploy global missile defenses,...control the new international commons of space and cyberspace(p128),...withdraw from the Kyoto Treaty on climate change, sabotage the International Criminal Court, kill proposals for controlling the global trade in small arms,...getting the Ballistic Missile Defense program up and running which required withdrawing from the Anti-ballistic Missile Treaty, (and for) invading Iraq (p138).”⁸

Why Iraq?

The neoconservatives had plans to invade Iraq long before 9/11. If the United States was to change the rules for world order it needed an example, and that example was Iraq. Saddam Hussein was hated, the country was weak from years of economic sanctions, logistically it was easy to invade, it had large oil reserves and it was strategically located for a strong permanent military presence by the United States in the Middle East. The attack on the World Trade Centers provided the excuse. The United States lied to the world about the reasons for the invasion and, as we now know, grossly miscalculated the cost and feasibility of actually occupying Iraq as welcomed liberators.

After 9/11 the United States had worldwide support for attacking Al Qaeda, even in Iran. But, the invasion of Iraq so alienated the world that the power and influence of United States has been severely damaged. Instead, we have produced a world crisis from which there is now no apparent solution.

Why Is the New American Century Wrong?

The ideology of the new American Century is a contradiction of all that America stands for. This misguided pursuit of wealth, through power and belief, started with the merger of the religious right with the neoconservative policies of George Bush and the Republican Party, and has now run its course, putting the pursuit of Empire above all else. The goal of the new American Empire, to spread Democratic capitalism into the four corners of the globe, based on unlimited growth in the pursuit of the accumulation of corporate wealth, is a prescription for disaster, not only for the United States, but for the world as well. Once we fight to secure energy and to protect global US interests, at the expense of all other nations, we will be hated and resisted by the rest of the world.

The Project for the New American Century is one that must be abandoned as a foolish, last-ditch effort to extend the Modern Era into a new era requiring new concepts, new visions and new leadership. The United States is a pivotal nation, at a pivotal time in history, for creating the dawn of the new era. As Dyer notes, the world needs the United States back as a participating citizen among the family of nations, and the world needs it back fast. It is not a question of whether the US will lose in Iraq, but whether it will lose fast enough.

Conclusion

Spanish Colonization is to Manifest Destiny, as Manifest Destiny is to the New American Century. Each one is based on the notion of Empire, in which overwhelming military Power is used to subjugate people in order to gain control of their Wealth. The conquest is based on a Belief system that justifies as “human progress” the devastation produced by the process on the people who happen to be in the way. In this sense, the Incas are to the Cherokee as the Cherokee are to the people of Iraq.

End Notes

¹ This is the title of an award PBS video documentary recounting the Pueblo Indian’s 450 years of contact with Europeans. www.shoppbs.org

² See Jared Diamond. Collapse, page 334.

³ Ronald Wright. Stolen Continents: 500 Years of Conquest and Resistance in the Americas. 2005, Chapter 1.

⁴ As above, page 66.

⁵ I wish to acknowledge and thank Alan Osborne of Southwest Seminars in Santa Fe for a stimulating presentation of the history of the Pueblo Indians on which this account is based.

⁶ Ronald Wright, see above

⁷ www.projectforanewamericancentury.com

⁸ see Gwynne Dyer, Future: Tense.