

Reynolds C.L. (1992) “A Disillusioned America”, *OPUS*, October, Australia, p.22.

American politics is notoriously exciting during the last months of a Presidential Campaign. The multi-million dollar Party Conventions, the brass bands, scores of placards and Hollywood celebrities all come together for that last-ditch effort to win the hearts of the American voters.

At least this is the way tradition would have it. This year, however, is the way of “who cares?” the candidates have become stale. Bush is heading the Republican ticket again, and Democratic candidate, Bill Clinton, is middle-of-the-road mediocrity. What America is looking for is change. More than that, it is looking for a new vision.

In 1979, President Jimmy Carter spoke about a malaise in political interest spreading across the country. By 1992 it's so widespread that it is political enemy number one, regardless of whom the candidate represents. Jerry Brown, speaking at this year's Democratic Convention in New York, said, “There is a deepening crisis of democracy in America. Today, half the people of the country have seceded from democracy because they don't believe their vote matters.” The political crisis of 1992 is not who will be President but who can give the nation hope.

The United States is on the decline as a super nation. It is suffering from internal decay. While the US has struggled throughout the 80's to regain control to international markets, without success, the beginning of the end for America was initiated by President Gorbachev. In bringing about the collapse of the USSR as a superpower. Gorbachev also signalled the end for America. Regardless of political persuasion, the one thing most Americans could agree on was their political will to combat the evils of communism. With the USSR gone and communism relegated to the shelves of academics, America lost its external purpose for struggle.

With the invasion of Kuwait by Iraq the weakening American resolve was evident in the inability of the State Department to come up with a foreign policy to deal with the situation. The best they could suggest was to have Bush call Gorbachev and ask if he would mind if the US led a UN invasion of Kuwait-Iraq in order to recapture a seat on OPEC and stabilise oil prices. It was OK Gorbie as long as Bush helped him get the Euro-American dollars he so badly needed for Russia. Favours for favours.

Yet, the US victory in the Middle East did little more for the American self image than to dispel a few ghosts about American military impotency left over from Vietnam. Bush was popular for only a few months.

As Americans turned from international war they refocussed on the problems of an ailing economy. The growing trade deficit, the collapse of the Savings and Loan Banks and high unemployment have all led to a loss of hope and the rise of internal and inter-racial tension. Such tension erupted in the LA Riots.

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It is not that the collapse of communism has caused America's economic and social problems but that it has allowed these problems to receive the national attention they have so badly needed. Americans, in general are unhappy, and with good reason.

The problem is not skin deep. The fall of communism has created a philosophical vacuum for America. The questions of self will; "who are we fighting?" and "what is our objective?" are presently without an answer. In losing an external enemy America lost its self determination. This is nowhere more evident than in Washington politics, for Government seems to have lost its purpose and is unable to help its people through this identity crisis.

In so many ways, as John Lennon sang after the Beatles broke up, "the dream is over". The Illusion that America lived for; that great American way of life, is fading and America is suffering from disillusion.

People are dissatisfied with the old dream. They want change and they want leadership. And this is the crisis facing the contenders for the White House: They don't have what the people want.

It is not just that people are feeling that their Government is not in control of their world anymore, people are feeling that they can't trust their Government anymore. The JFK movie was stunning to its audience around the world because it dared to suggest that President Johnson had committed treason. (There is perhaps no need to mention other famous Americans who have come close to the same charge: Nixon and North). For Americans, this continual disclosure of corruption at the top has eroded their faith in government.

The climate of discontent has opened the way for a rank outsider, Ross Perot, to almost steal the Top Job by offering no more than criticism of the policies of others.

In May, this year, a *TIME/CNN* POLL GAVE Perot 33% of the possible vote, with Bush at 28% and Clinton at 24%. Perot's percentage increased up until the time of his withdrawal from his informal race.

Ross Perot never registered as a candidate for the Presidency but he had the competition scared. The time is right for a saviour politician as it has been on but a few occasions in American history. In 1952 General Douglas MacArthur had popularity support of 66% to Truman's 25%, and at the height of Senator Joseph McCarthy's purge against communism he carried 50% of the popularity strakes against President Eisenhower. Both men, like Ross Perot, were outside the system and able to see it's weaknesses. Neither man, however, was to become President.

In the current scenario, the only reason America didn't get its saviour riding in to take the White House keys was that Perot turned out to e a psychotic flake. He had nothing to offer and he could not have done the job as President. It was inevitable that Perot would self destruct.

And so the American people have lost out yet again. Drained of their hope and trust but still looking for a new leader with a new vision. Nevertheless, the American people are to be admired because they have something that so may other countries lack; an inner resolve to seek a better future. While America is in this transition period it will prove an education to see the country find a new identity. Unfortunately, the quality of candidates now seeking Presidential election suggest that America is unlikely to get what it needs in the next four years.