

Camp*aign Response

August 25, 2009

To: Charles Sullivan's, "Whatever Happened to Courage?" (full text on p.2)

Dear Charles,

As I finished reading your thesis, "Whatever Happened to Courage?" my stride was suddenly interrupted and I tripped over your closing thought:

"The organizing principle of life itself is not competition—survival of the fittest; it is mutual cooperation, looking out for the welfare of others. This is what makes life worth living."

I understand your intent, but question the science behind this statement - and this is a critical point, since it is actually the science of the matter that explains the behaviors addressed throughout your passionately written critique.

The truth is that all human behavior is integrally linked to the Survive/Thrive (S/T) instinct. In fact, the behavior of all living organisms, plant and animal, revolves around S/T. It is how are designed; it, not mutual cooperation, is 'by nature' the most fundamental principle of life.

Thus, humans cooperate to the degree that each perceives a potential increase in survival value. Far from being self-centered this is precisely in keeping with how Homo sapiens is neurologically wired – and I say this as a theist. It is the basis for the tribalism of old and its modern equivalent – provincialism. Any strategy for change that involves compelling humans to behave contrary to the S/T instinct will require the same faith needed for bread to evolve from granite – possible, but highly unlikely.

The good news – quite wonderful in fact – is that we are entering an age of global transparency, which is parochialism's 'natural predator,' as it were. And as the survival value of provincialism fades, tolerance will, by nature, ensue. Even now, close-mindedness is being abruptly bunked with brilliance that is black, dynamism that is female, professionalism that is Islamic, family members who are gay, Hispanics that are more industrious than our children, and perhaps even a Hindu, standing over a cold table, holding a beating heart, preparing to replace it with a newer model.

Your see, obliterating inequity is not a function of courage as much as *realizing that there is nothing to fear*. The actualization of your dreams will occur naturally, not through the screwing up of emotional bravery, but the hastening of social transparency. That said, it is indeed a wonderful time to be alive.

Sincerely,



Jon Sherry
Founding Director

HQ@ForAmericanKids.org
www.ForAmericanKids.org

- ✓ Join me at LinkedIn by clicking, [LINK](#) now.
- ✓ To join our LinkedIn GROUP click, [CAMP* AIGN](#).
- ✓ If you are not "LinkedIn" click, [GETLINKED](#).
- ✓ Follow me at Twitter by clicking, [TWIT](#) now.
- ✓ To help, click [VOLUNTEER](#) now.
- ✓ To give, click [DONATE](#) now.

The Camp*aign for American Kids: a little change *for a WHOLE life!*

Information Clearing House

NEWS YOU WON'T FIND ON CNN

Whatever Happened to Courage?

By Charles Sullivan

For me, one of the most valuable lessons taught by history is that from time to time people rise up and fight back against horrible tyranny and against impossible odds. There are many examples: Shay's Rebellion, the battle of Matewan, and the battle of Blair Mountain, the Ludlow Massacre, the Haymarket Strike and, more recently, the race wars that culminated in the 1960s. Many of these struggles, conspicuously absent from our history texts, are connected to labor disputes, when workers were forced to organize and to strike for more humane working conditions, including the eight hour work day. Massive strikes have played a significant role in the economic and social history of the U.S. Thus it is no coincidence that America has the bloodiest labor history of any industrialized nation. How a people react to oppression and injustice says much about what kind of people and, indeed, what kind of nation they are. In those responses is revealed the national character.

Throughout much of our history, so inhumane and utterly deplorable were working conditions that workers frequently had to resort to the strike—a strategy that remains labor's most effective and underutilized tool to this day. In the past, companies routinely hired armed thugs to prevent workers from meeting and organizing unions. Despite the Constitution and the Bill of Rights, workers did not have the legal right to form unions until Roosevelt's 'New Deal.' Belonging to a union could cost you everything. Not belonging to a union assured one's fate as an indentured servant of the company. The notorious Baldwin-Felts Detective Agency has a long history of terrorizing workers on behalf of the company bosses. Intimidation, threats, beatings, lynchings and shootings were commonplace during the industrial revolution. Those who demanded the eight hour work day, better wages and the right to form unions faced grave and palpable danger. Organizers often lived short but intense lives. It required courage to stand up to the company thugs and to fight for justice. Those who did were called reds and communists by their capitalist oppressors.

Even though the workplace remains the site of gross injustice and tyranny, few of us today can image the atmosphere of oppression and intimidation that once prevailed. By the grace of courageous but otherwise ordinary individuals, workers organized themselves against company tyranny; and we gained the eight hour work day, the forty hour work week, the end of child labor, better wages, vacation from work and more humane working conditions. These gains were not given through the benevolence of the company bosses—they were won through enormous self sacrifice, obtained by sweat and blood, and often through armed rebellion.

Reading accounts of American labor history causes me to marvel at the character and courage of those who fought for social and economic justice against incredible odds. Quite literally, those men and women risked their lives for one another, and many brutally oppressed women and men died for the cause of ending industrial slavery. Not only were union organizers menaced by the company goon squads, they were often beaten and killed by the police, and the National Guard. The real form of government a nation has is revealed by which side its law enforcement takes when insurrections around issues of social justice arise. Traditionally, the police and the militia have been called forth to defend the oppressors—the wealthy and the powerful—from the oppressed who demand social justice. Thus, we know beyond all doubt what kind of government we have and who runs it—a practice that continues to this day, as demonstrated in the civil rights marches of the sixties and in contemporary anti-war protests.

The most striking trait exhibited by those who risked their lives for just causes was their unflinching courage in the face of horrible oppression and colossal odds—something that is strikingly absent from the comparatively safe times of the present. What is it about the women and men who fought the Felts Detective Agency, the local police (owned by the company bosses) and the militia that is absent from the comparatively feeble protests of today? Have we as a people become too soft and comfortable? Or is it that the injustice has not yet reached our limits of tolerance? Is it that we believe the propaganda that is fomented in the print media, and over the electromagnetic airwaves that saturate our slumbering minds? Is it that we are willing to look the other way while our government perpetrates crimes against nature and humanity, so long as our material comforts are not threatened? Have we become so narrow and self serving that we no longer care about the welfare of others? Or does America no longer produce people of mettle?

Why do we tolerate the kind of government we now have? Why do we allow it to rape and plunder the earth that provides the sweet gift of life, and divvy up the profits among the rich? Why do we sit quietly and allow the invasion and occupation of sovereign nations by the armed forces? Why do we allow our government to fleece the poor by providing eternal welfare to the rich? Why do we allow this government to represent the interest of the wealthy by neglecting the needs of the many? Why do we allow those in power to stealthily pilfer our civil rights, our hard won liberties with hardly a whimper of indignation or protest? How do we allow our government to cripple and assassinate democratic governments all over the world and call it democracy? How do we allow those in power to steal our elections without filling the streets with massive and unrelenting protests? How do we allow the practice of extraordinary rendition to occur under our watch? Why do we tolerate the intolerable while keeping a smile on our bright faces? Why do we allow the charade of the neocon agenda to continue and offer little more than token resistance? What does it take to make us angry and indignant to the point of rebellion? I could go on indefinitely.

Our predecessors in the labor and civil rights movements chose to die on their feet rather than live on their knees by bowing down to unjust authority. They would not allow themselves to be intimidated into submission even by armed goon squads under the employ of the company bosses. Not only did they stand on their own two feet, erect like real citizens—they stood for the principles that this country was supposedly founded upon. They fought and died for them. If there are no longer causes worth fighting and dying for, surely life is not worth living. As Dr. King pointed out, this is spiritual death. Are we a nation that is experiencing spiritual death?

Without courage and self sacrifice in the public interest, there can be no justice. The future will be forged by putting our professed beliefs to the test of action. What good is faith that cannot be put into action for the common good? As surely as day follows night, justice follows courage. Let each of us ask ourselves : What are we made of? What, if anything, do we stand for? There are no safe positions of neutrality. Which side are you on? Are we creating the kind of history that will make our great grandchildren proud? Is it the kind of history that will inspire them to be free; or is the kind of history that will assure their servitude to the masters of war?

It is far better to fight and die for just causes, even against impossible odds, than to live in the perceived safety of indifference and complacency that characterizes our time. Our dance of life on this earth is short. We seriously delude ourselves if we think there is safety in capitulation to unjust authority. Our spirits thirst for justice. **The organizing principle of life itself is not competition—survival of the fittest; it is mutual cooperation,** looking out for the welfare of others. This is what makes life worth living. The public interest is a far nobler cause than private wealth and industrial slavery.

Charles Sullivan is a photographer, social agitator, and free lance writer living in the eastern panhandle of West Virginia. He welcomes your comments at earthdog@highstream.net