

Montoliu: The American dream's hidden cost

Contributed by Raphael Montoliu
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While some blame specific ideologies for the sub-prime mortgage crisis and the current recession, the actual source of the problem might not be exclusively political but also cultural.

America has a unique cultural model, almost an archetype, not found to be so dominant in other parts of the world. The mold or model here is material success, or wealth, with all its trappings. It is metaphorically called the pursuit of happiness, but it remains as the original 19th century wording intended the pursuit of property, which could, today, also be more accurately called simple greed.

This American dream, which has lately turned into a nightmare for many, usually mostly comprises a big house, a couple of cars or preferably the biggest SUVs that can be found anywhere on the planet, and the latest high-tech toys besides a television for each person living under a same roof, so family members not only do not have to speak but do not even have to see or spend time with one another, the outcome of which will later feed the need for psychotherapies and the content of popular mainstream television programs such as Dr Phil.

What is uniquely American is that, through the miracle of relatively easy credit, the trappings of success are acquired before success occurs … in most other nations, ordinary people seem to understand they have to make money before deciding how to spend it … you could call this simple logic and fundamental practicality, like planting a tree by the roots.

In America, success, like most that is directed at the gullible masses, is not portrayed as being (successful) but as having (the trappings of success); it is not about reality but appearances, like politics and advertising, and like the media … like all of what constitutes the popular culture.

And it is about having it all right here right now, which could be described as a neurotic impulse, but is most often a symptom of immaturity. So people grab all they can today and worry about paying for it tomorrow, if ever.

For most the dream is indeed materialistic, but the same frantic drive to have gratification without delays taints and defines everything, from instant coffee to instant religious salvation and all in between, from political sound bites to a thirst for instant metaphysical enlightenment, instant mastery in any field, instant weight loss, becoming ripped in four weeks, calling and finding your soul mate in seven weeks and becoming a multi-millionaire in a couple of months.

One, two, three, by the time you snap your fingers diner is served, you and your toddlers speak three foreign languages fluently, you have lost forty pounds, your net worth has increased one thousand folds, and you look and feel better than when you were nineteen years old, all without effort whatsoever.

This could be another aspect of the so-called rat race, since once you train or condition people to run everywhere, they usually cannot ever slow down, not even to eat a decent meal or read and comprehend a sentence that has more than five words.

The cruel irony, which appears to be lost on so many in the mainstream culture, is that real success generally means greater freedom, what is also called financial independence, while acquiring the trappings of success without success translates, in practical terms, as abject, odious bondage, the type that justifiably inspired revolutions in previous centuries.

Voluntary servitude is however the name of the game in today's society. Rather than making an initial effort and then perhaps getting rewarded, people are taught they should seek the reward first, which becomes as a ball and chain that cannot ever be enjoyed, because now comes the struggle to sacrifice for it for many very long years, coupled with the constant fear of losing it all, the stress of which produces cancers, ulcers, addictions, rampant divorces and very unhappy children.

The system obviously generates and preys on such immaturity, and not just con artists with get rich quick schemes but banks, credit card companies, commerce and of course the government which offers all sorts of incentives for so-called consumers to become ever more indebted, and which as a matter of fact long ago erected the financial and legal structures necessary for this endless exploitation of the populace. This structure tempts us to have it all now, and while it is presented as gaining status and reaching for fulfillment in glossy advertising and glorious commercials, the hidden cost is drudgery and literal serfdom.

In a consumer-driven economy, no laws will legislate intelligent, independent living, on the contrary. The more people spend money they do not have, the faster the engine runs, as it all is founded on illusions, on smoke and mirrors, like our paper money that is printed faster than monopoly money ever could, while the nation becomes bankrupt and the elite ever wealthier and more powerful. So what is the solution to such pervasive problems?

The simplest solution might be to jump off the merry-go-round, to no longer consume, or as little as practically possible. If major banks and multinational corporations have indeed embraced a globalist agenda meant to level the world into a homogenous mass of paupers and slaves, let them pay the price.

Become independent by recycling, growing, building, and bartering for your needs, and turn your back on a predatory system. Buy used whenever possible, and share and exchange information and knowledge to reclaim your power as a people, since the wannabe royalty, the elite, derives its power by dividing us, making us compete for crumbs like overcrowded rats in a laboratory cage.

If success comes, enjoy the fruits of your labor, if not, enjoy life, but whatever you do, do it on your own terms rather than because you have been conditioned to fill the bottomless pockets of an elite that manipulates you to the detriment of your health, your sanity, your happiness, your life, and of those of the ones you love.

The slogan “Growth for the sake of growth is the ideology of the cancer cell” might prove accurate after

all.

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