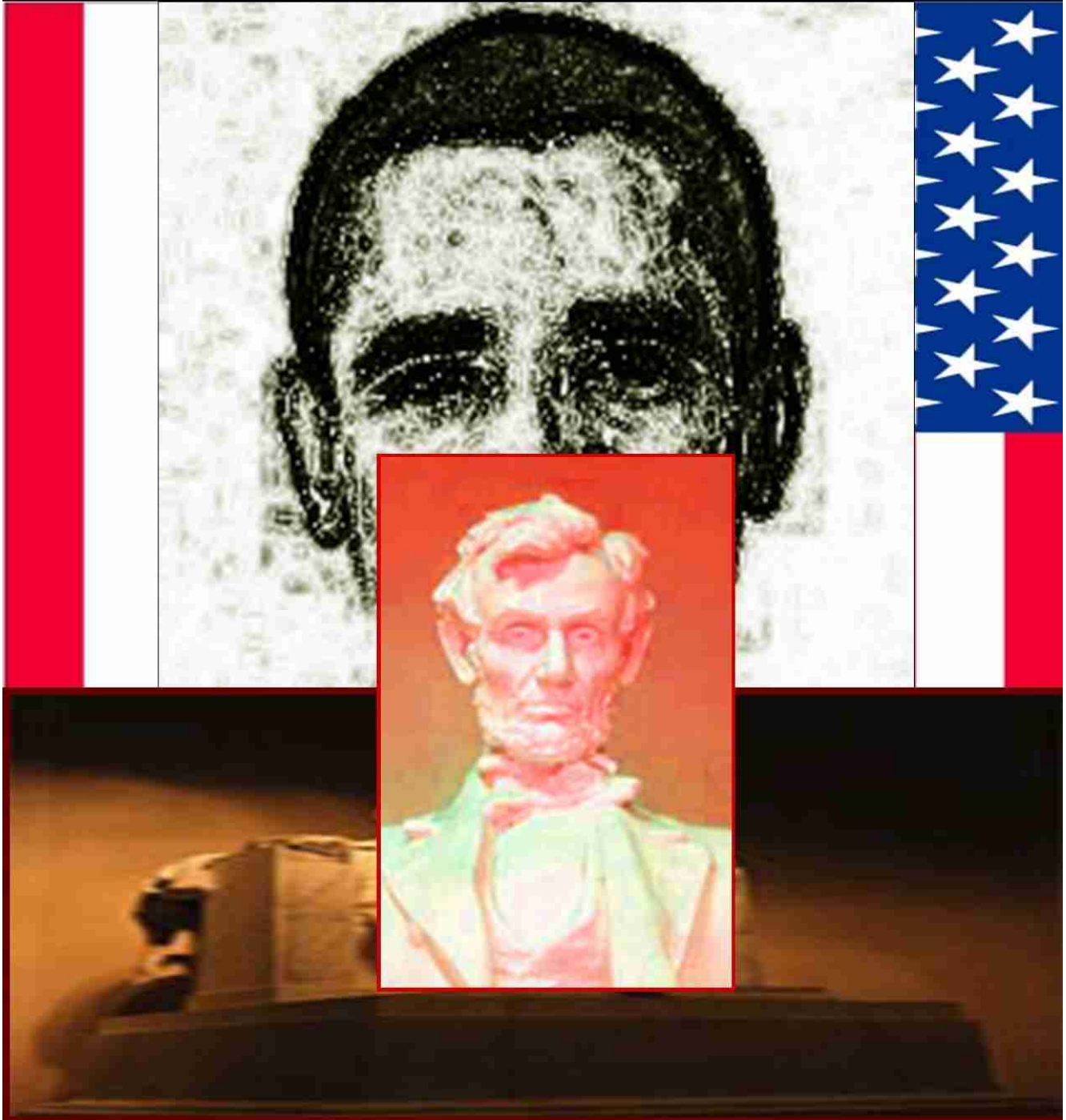


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CAPITALIST AMERICA ON A HINGE—The night is darkest before dawn and dawn is not coming anytime soon. The beacon of light that shines from Liberty Island's shore is dimming fast. We are living in a challenging era, the worse since the Great Depression. The spirit of capitalism lays shattered behind the glass doors of Wall Street and Main Street as investment banks, corporations, and small businesses come tumbling down. The earthshaking colossal collapse of corporate America is felt worldwide. From the Americas to Europe and Asia, citizens of the world hold their breath and brace for the worst. And the worst continues to unfold.

On a blustery and icy day, the twenty-sixth day of January 2009, the economy of Iceland collapsed. On that same day, over 30,000 American workers lost their jobs. Pfizer, IBM, Intel, GM, Motorola, Boeing, Starbucks, Home Depot, and many more all handed pink slips to their fear stricken employees. "Clear out your desk and go home," the employees were told. When the day was done, some headed home to break the bad news to their family. Others headed straight to the bar to kill the pain. Some wandered the streets not knowing what to do next. Such is the state in America. We are living in a time when a man froze to death in his own home behind an ice glazed window because he could not afford to pay his heating bills. We are living in an era when a man took his own life after he gunned down his wife and five children because he was laid off. We are living in a land where thousands walk the icy streets homeless, where countless homes are taped up, locked and unoccupied. This is the spirit of capitalism at work, capitalism at its worst. With the hammer of a judge's gavel, doors are pried opened, and clothes and furniture are thrown out of houses for thugs to pick through while law abiding citizens diligently remain at work so that they can sweat up a dollar more to pay their looming bills.

We are a nation of excess. Those who have indulged in too much and those who have too little try to emulate those who have too much, at the cost of piling up credit card debt. The rich have big houses, big cars, big corporations, and big egos. The poor have big hearts, big ambitions, and big dreams. Everyone wants to reach for the sky with a quick fix. "I am going to be rich," a man said to himself as he quickly scratched off a five-dollar lottery ticket with his dirt-filled fingernail, only to discover a disappointing loss. Determined to overcome all odds, he pulled out another five-dollar bill from his pocket, riddled with holes, and handed it to the cashier behind the gas station counter. Such is the state of America.

With the economic meltdown of 2008, the spidery veins of giant corporations are showing their ugliness, like the varicose veins of an aging man or woman. Will capitalism survive, or will it give way to other economic laws? In the darkest hours of this nation's life when nothing functions, will revolution rise up? One can argue that no such revolution can possibly take place given the manner in which we have handled our trying past. But the dynamic nature of history states otherwise: The law of dynamic equilibrium will always push back and recalibrate to reestablish balance.

Nature's constant flux has caused the tectonic shift of the earth for millions of years. Along with this shift came changes in landmass, plants and animal species. Old landmasses vanished and new ones emerged, and old species disappeared and new ones arose. Many of these changes came into being without much help from man. But now that man has a say in matters, we have to ask ourselves the big question, "What percentage of our destructiveness and unwillingness to compromise for the better will cause the force of equilibrium to push back?" The dynamic nature of the universe never seems to grow old. There once was a super continent, and now there are seven smaller ones. There once were larger than life dinosaurs and now there are elephants and whales.

Capitalism, it seems, has given in to avarice, the third deadly sin, which has forced the law of equilibrium to push back to reestablish balance to an imbalance. How we endure this force will determine our survival in this sliding economy. Will we stick our heels into the ground to resist balance, eventually being pushed off the cliff, or will we adapt to new thinking, new laws?

Richard Quan
Managing Editor, Impact Times

AMERICA HAS SPOKEN—On a leap of faith, voters chose Barack Obama to lead the nation in a new direction. Obama spoke eloquently in the days leading up to the election, of change and decisive action. But the time for rhetoric is over. Words alone will change nothing. Unlike his predecessor, who cared nothing of polls or for the advice of others, Obama must work as part of a team, as our government was intended to work. Only by working in concert with Congress, through discussion with his expert advisers, can he hope to implement his ideas and his plan to lead America in a new direction. In 2009 America will learn whether Obama's words will translate to action.

J. Conrad Guest
Contributing Editor, Impact Times

by Jenny Reed

IT IS NOT HARD to turn on the television to hear news of a slumping economy. The bad news, it seems, is enough to keep anyone from traveling these days, particularly internationally. However, that is not the case. Despite recession worries, travel trend watchers say Americans aren't giving up their vacation plans. They are being more cost conscious. With these economic challenges I thought I would revisit this topic and reiterate creative ways to travel. The cruise lines, tour companies and resorts are stepping up to the plate with special deals and packages. Nationwide spring travel booking figures show most of the leading destinations this year are not linked to the euro. In addition, there are still countries and destinations where the U.S. dollar is strong. From the Caribbean and South America to Asia and simply staying in the U.S., there's still hope for an affordable vacation. The top spots include Alaska, Orlando, Cancun, Honolulu, Dominican Republic and Argentina.

The cruise industry has been reaping good business from vacationers now attracted by the value of "drive time" vacations. The cruise industry projects 12.8 million people will take a cruise this year, up 200,000 from last year. Do you remember as a child getting up in the wee hours of the morning to be piled into the family car to drive to a vacation destination? There is a surge in these "drive time" vacations again. As mentioned before, Georgia and the surrounding states have beaches, mountains, state parks and lakes to explore. From a cruising perspective, the Atlanta area is an easy drive to such ports as Mobile, Jacksonville, Tampa, Charleston, and Port Canaveral. Here are some key things again to remember when planning your trip:

1. **Travel off-season.** Every destination has a season that is considered a "value season". This means lower prices and less crowds. January and September are great months to find great travel rates.
2. **Go where the dollar is strong.** Visit or cruise to such areas as the South America, Barbados, Jamaica, or Switzerland. Passports are required for international air travel.
3. **Make it a surprise!** This is the perfect time to plan next year's trip and stay within budget. Also, you can present a gift certificate at the holidays and have the family help plan the actual trip.
4. **Book a travel package.** Very often you can save money by booking package deals that include the airfare, hotel, meals, car rental, etc.
5. **Use promotional "City Cards" to save on attractions.** Cities around the world offer City Cards/Passes to tourists that promise savings through discounts on top tourist attractions and public transportation. This is especially true for Orlando.
6. **Be creative with the planned activities.** Plan a picnic lunch, hike along a bubbling stream, fly kites on a windy day, or skip rocks across the mountain lake.
7. **Travel with extended family or with groups of friends.** Split the car rental bill or carpool, split the room costs and take a half price vacation. Or rent a house together on the beach during off season.
8. **Seek the advice and services of a seasoned travel agent.** Unlike a mega online travel seller, these experts not only provide invaluable and personalized service but can often times get unadvertised deals. It is nice to be able to talk to the same person when you have a question.

So plan ahead, seek advice and travel! Don't let the economy or bad media take the place of truly enjoying time together with your family. Whether it is long weekend at the lake or a cruise to Caribbean, relax and enjoy the escape from reality. It is amazing what being away from the cell phone, television, e-mail, and work can do to regenerate the soul!

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SIX-HUNDRED-THOUSAND more jobs were lost in January. More than three and a half million Americans have been left jobless since this debacle on Wall Street began the most in thirty -four years and the experts claim we've not yet reached the halfway point in our economic recovery. I wonder if we can. I've perhaps insulated myself from these staggering numbers, telling myself my job is secure even as I've watched many of my own colleagues be given the pink slip from my company. Yet hearing these numbers, I wonder when, or if, my turn will come. Eighteen more months to endure.

A coalition of Democrats and some Republicans reached a compromise this past weekend that trimmed billions in spending from an earlier version of the Senate economic stimulus bill. A vote is expected to come on Tuesday.

On Larry King the other night, Steve Forbes, chairman and CEO of Forbes, blasted Obama's plan, claiming it was put together in haste and that several similar plans put forth during the 1990s in Japan failed; while Eric Schmidt, CEO of Google, liked it, stating it puts the money into the hands of those who need it most. Which of them is right in his assessment?

I don't pretend to have the answer, nor do I have a clue as to whether the president's plan, or the Senate's plan, is the right plan long-term. Jobs, banking, foreclosures I know are of immediate concern. I understand something must be done quickly, but I caution against taking action for the sake of taking action. Any plan passed must provide long-term benefit and not just short-term relief.

Schmidt claims the American economy is more resilient than Japan's, and that the American businessman is more innovative, which, to me, sounds like arrogant American propaganda.

In the 1970s, when Japan first started exporting automobiles to this country, they were laughed at, called great imitators but poor innovators. In less than a decade, the American automotive industry was scrambling to catch up with Japanese technology.

If similar plans failed to work in Japan, why would we think they can here?

Any plan should be debated, amended, streamlined, reworked like a Hollywood screenplay, until Congress and President Obama alike are confident that they can put forth the best plan possible to bring the best possible results, to the country's benefit.

The national news reports that Obama's brief honeymoon is over, that he's ruffled enough pachyderm feathers in trying to get his plan pushed through, a mere two weeks into his presidency to last four more years. But really, this isn't about parties, at least it shouldn't be. This is about our economy and the future of America. The past has been ugly with avarice, and I hope we never go back to the way it once was, business as usual, he with the most toys wins.

My sincere hope is that something better will rise up out of the ashes of what once was— something more akin to what my father fought for in World War II.

J. CONRAD GUEST is the author of *January's Paradigm*. His fiction and essays appear in various online and print publications, including *Cezanne's Carrot*, *Saucy Vox*, *River Walk Journal*, *63 Channels*, *The Writers Post Journal*, *Redbridge Review*, and *Blood and Thunder: Musings on the Art of Medicine*. He is also the cofounder of and cigar, fiction and non-fiction editor for *The Smoking Poet*. CONTACT: www.myspace.com/jconradguest

IN 1968 ANDY WARHOL predicted, "In the future, everyone will be world-famous for 15 minutes," so I immediately hopped in line and have been camping out in it ever since.

That the future has arrived is hard to argue against. We have flat-screen TV's, robots on Mars, and iPhones. Books aren't just on tape, they're on things called Kindles. The internet connects you to anyone and anything anywhere, and then Google Earth will show it to you.

And, I wish the Lieutenant Uhura wanna-be in line right behind me would stop yammering into her earhook to her BFF.

Now that we're solidly in the future, it begs the question: when do I get my 15 minutes of worldwide fame Warhol promised me? How much longer do I have to wait in this bloody line? And sorry, Time magazine, but making me the "Person of the Year" back in 2006 by having me look into a Mylar rectangle at a warped reflection of myself doesn't cut it—that was like Nick the bartender in "It's A Wonderful Life" handing out wings by ringing the "No Sale" button on his cash register.

Andy Warhol had talent, but I'm guessing he wasn't very good at math, or that he ever bothered to glance back to see the queue forming behind him the minute he opened his big yap. Since I'm still waiting patiently to follow him through the worldwide fame turnstile, which I still can't even see from here, I'll use my iPhone: the internet, and calculator, and do the math. Let's see...the on-line World Population Clock says there are approximately 6.8 billion people in line right now. Since fame can only be doled out at a rate of 4 people per hour, we'll divide this figure by 4. That means it will take about 1.7 billion hours to give everyone their due. 1.7 billion hours rounds off to 71 million days, or just under...200,000 years?

Oy.

Okay, I'm really close to getting out of line right now, but everyone else is staying in. What do they know that I don't?

Hey, Paris! No cuts!

The nerve of some people.

Think positive thoughts. Maybe I missed something. Lots of mags and media outlets put together lists of famous people each year, and those are usually lists of 100, so if there can be 100 famous people at any one time, that means I can divide by 100.

Which takes me to...2,000 years?

Hmm.

This is not really helping. I'm over 50 years old and have been in this line for 41 of them already. I'm starting to lose my resolve, as well as my youthful good looks. Oh, but that means I can subtract another 41 years! 1,959 years to go.

Damn.

I'll never be famous at this rate. Especially with people like Paris Hilton and Joe the Plumber taking cuts.

Back of the line, Wurzelbacher!

Sheesh! There ought to be a law.

Oh, hell, I might as well keep waiting. I've gone this far, and with my new iPhone to play with, I can do anything I want from here anyway.

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EXTREME DIVERSITY MAKEOVER OPPORTUNITY FOR CORPORATE AMERICA by M. Sandi Aigoro

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AMERICA, A NATION which formerly embraced a master/slave mentality, has embarked upon a new frontier of equality. Our newly elected President has lifted expectations and renewed hope as America's example to the world community. The 2008 election brings to view and acceptance by a majority of Americans, the notion that it is okay to be diverse. Electing the son of a white mother and African father, who was raised by a white grandmother and grandfather and married to a descendent of slavery is a profound statement by the American people. His ascension to the office of the President of the United States presents a litany of opportunities for examination by white men and women, single parents and working poor, Africans, African-Americans, immigrants to the United States and the international community. White male and female executives most certainly are able to take pride in their identity with the President. The fact that he was a child of a white mother and black father is not the entire picture. After the death of his mother, a single parent, the President-Elect was raised by his maternal grandparents, who were white.

President Obama's values were shaped in the struggle of his own identity as a biracial individual, which impacted how he interfaced with other races. This is also the case to some degree with many companies that are trying to manage diverse workforces and issues regarding discrimination. The President was able to extract values, ideologies, beliefs and lifestyle from his grandparents, which could be translated into motivation and reference points for his success. Some of these references could be considered for corporations to emulate. For example, as a biracial child, he learned the misperception that whites do not experience the devastation of poverty as single parents. As a child he experienced the hopelessness and helplessness of watching his single mother struggle to make ends meet while hoping for the best education and outcome for her children. He saw how poverty negatively impacted them, like poor minorities, with economic and social stratification that punishes less successful families.

It is evident by President Obama's success with diversity in his marriage, family, education and politics that he learned key lessons from his experience. Companies now have an opportunity to re-engineer how employees are evaluated in the hiring and employment phases. Without Affirmative Action, an individual like the President-Elect could have easily been missed. It would be a good idea for educators, family law practitioners, Human Resource professionals, and company executives to study the President's path to success to find key reasons why he was able to succeed against the odds. It is also valuable for African-Americans and immigrants to study the basis for success of individuals like Nelson Mandela, Jimmy Carter, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and other diversity activists recently acknowledged in our society. By removing judgment and a need for restitution, whites in America might begin to release their guilt and move voluntarily toward a more even playing field—similar to the change in discriminatory attitudes directed toward Jewish and Japanese members resulting from pre- and post-WWII social backlash.

Referencing the recent results of the election, white Americans will continue to realize the benefits of embracing good values and leaders regardless of their origins based on sex, race or nationality. The election of a new diverse president presents America with a great opportunity to make significant strides to resolve and heal from the past. White men and women, Africans, African-Americans, immigrants to the United States and the international community are watching corporate America along with political America to see if the progress with diversity ends up an everyday corporate and societal experience.

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