

Chapter 5

Sacred Cows

And, finally, each and every leader's desire to protect and enhance their role leaves us with a significant legacy.

There are sacred cows everywhere. Every country, every culture, every major organization, has a herd of these big, fat, lazy, creatures with sad eyes and floppy jowls wandering around, causing traffic accidents, pooping on your pavement, eating your daisies. Moreover, each herd has a host of supporters who tout their presence as such a blessing and privilege that the poor ugly animals have reached the ultimate level of protection - "untouchable". Even if you hurt them by mistake you may suffer a severe penalty. Far too many of the ideals and organizations that govern our lives have been trampled and soiled by these beasts.

Every day their cheerleaders take the dreams and oratory of our founding fathers, mix it with a deep need to feel proud and unafraid, and twist it into a complex bird's nest of protection mechanisms keeping us at arms length from these big stupid creatures.

Governments are the primary sanctuary for these sacred beasts, and it's easy to understand why fundamental change is such a frightening concept in the minds of those who steward our governance. They already see themselves at the pinnacle of human achievement. How can they not be, we've pledged allegiance to the offices they hold since we were five years old; we've stood up and sung the national anthem at every basketball, baseball, hockey, football and whatever else game we've gone to, and many other large get-together's as well. Tears have welled up in our eyes during war movies when our troops won heroically against great odds while the orchestra filled the air with appropriately emotive military hymns. I'm damn proud to be a citizen of this country, even though I'm not quite sure how I can be proud of something I had nothing to do with. What is to change? This country is already the greatest on earth... just start adding up all of its greatness and the list becomes monumental. How can anyone not believe we are head and shoulders above the rest?

Sound familiar. It's not a new story and it's not consigned to my country alone. An important part of nationalism is educating your children into the special privilege of being born within your borders, and constantly reminding

adults why they should support and contribute to their governing system. Some countries are better at this than others and some are so good it's a little scary, but the higher the quality of your propaganda the steeper may be the downsides.

If your system is the best in the world, the standard against which all others should be measured, why must it be open to scrutiny? Whatever small gains possibly occurring from change must be balanced against the risk of creeping detrimental influences. Why mess with the best? It has worked so well for so long.

Of course, all the leaders in the country, whether government, industrial, or spiritual agree and pay homage to the system. They have seen it in action, worked with it, and been brought forth to their exalted status by this system. It is a system that recognizes their ability and hard work and, certainly, their patriotism. If they weren't patriots they couldn't be leaders. In fact, if some youthful indiscretion is discovered, even long after they have established their leadership status, such as a one time membership in an anti-government organization, or participation at a flag burning, or the discovery of a speech promoting fundamental change, their credibility would be suspect and their careers diminished or lost.

In financial management circles there is a belief that the people who invest the greatest share of their wealth in a proposal are the ones who will believe in it the longest. We are taught to invest in our nations from the moment we are born, to invest our souls and, in times of crisis, to offer up our bodies, and we are to do this without question. In times of uncertainty we are taught to trust our governing institutions - to hold sacred the founding principles, the workings of the legislature, the office of the prime minister or president. They exist to protect us and have proven their ability over the generations. At least, so we are taught.

What makes us so sure these leaders, and the institutions they represent, actually represent us? What is forcing them to act in our best interest during a crisis, or at any time for that matter? If our history books are to be believed the answer is, hundreds of years of refinement by the greatest political minds of each generation. It is they who have brought us to this apex of democratic achievement enjoyed by all. A fortuitous succession of visionaries have laid the ground rules for our system's creation while heroes and martyrs sacrificed themselves to establish and defend it - and continue to do so even today. We can't dishonor them by suggesting we didn't arrive at the best system possible.

American Presidents hold the most powerful office in the world and what is their qualification for doing so? In truth, what could be anyone's qualification for holding such a huge responsibility? There have been better ones and worse ones but what stops the bad ones from creating disasters like the Vietnam and Iraq wars, or ignoring their own laws in famous cases like Watergate and Iran Contra, not to mention the almost weekly revelations of past smaller abuses. The decisions made in the Oval Office affect the safety and security of the whole world and some of those decisions have been very destructive. What protects us from them? The reality is, apparently, nothing, but change is out of the question.

Governments have learned how simple and emotional their populations are. We, the people, just want to live a happy life and achieve something worthwhile in the process. They, with the power of their intelligence, their reservoir of information, and their physical resources are able to lead us in whatever direction they want to go, at least in the short run. We elected them because we believed they were special. We watched leaders from all over this country endorse and support them, brag about them, say glowing and heroic words in describing them. How can we not trust them? And when they achieve power they gain the ability to present an even stronger argument for their actions, which we, as individuals, don't have the time or resources to rebut. A representative democracy depends on trust.

The fact is, once our governments are elected we can't stop them from doing whatever they wish. We can only vote them out the next time around. In the meantime, they control our nation's agenda - while we sit by and evaluate their progress and their eventual success... supposedly with the help of a hard working and effective opposition party. Here's where more poop hits the pavement. The opposition can never be as powerful as the government unless the government has made such a mess they oppose themselves. In the early part of any elected government the opposition is virtually non-existent. They are the sore-losers who couldn't get their act together and win. Even as time goes by and heals opposition wounds they never have the same access to information and physical resources as government, let alone to the power and majesty of "the office" the leader holds. Oppositions always play catch up and, at the same time, they are restrained from advocating changes that reduce the power of the "office" by their desire to wield the same power after they win the next election.

The various media used to fill in as a secondary, and more objective, opposition but governments have become so powerful, so good at out "spinning" the media, that the media is cowed into submission. They are a business. They sell news and advertising and if they become unpopular no one will buy their advertising space and they may be out of business. The media will attack a government or support a government but only if the popular flow is already moving in that direction. They kind of pile on after the fumble has been snagged by someone else.

When a system is that good at protecting itself everyone is seen as a potential threat. Today in certain enlightened democratic countries if a popular female country and western singing group criticizes their country's leader they may be banned from radio stations, harassed by the media, vilified by government officials, shunned by other members of their industry, and threatened by anonymous callers. If a columnist writes a column that asks tough questions of their leaders for authorizing a military attack on another sovereign nation the story may not be published. If it is, their newspaper may lose much needed marketing revenue, their colleagues may attack them both professionally and personally and, regardless of their stance on other issues, henceforth they will be labeled as biased in their reporting.

The system creates and protects its leaders by sanctifying the office they hold, and the leaders, in turn, promote and enhance the need to protect the system. Round and round it goes reinforcing itself at every turn. All the while generations are indoctrinated from birth, until death, in the greatness and supremacy of this system. To suggest that fundamental flaws exist; that protections against the abuse of power are woefully inadequate, that cabal elitism is rampant, and that an understanding and desire for real democracy is non-existent, is to call into question the entire heritage of the country; to fly in the face of every leader there is, and ever was, from the founding fathers to the next president or prime minister... and to open yourself to the distrust and condemnation of every "patriot" ever born under that flag. In effect, to seek improvement for the system is to be a traitor to it. How sad and frightening is that?

As for sacred cows... nothing nominated by the hand of man is sacred, and if you are asked to believe differently you are following someone's personal agenda. Only God can designate what is sacred and He doesn't tell us about it. He gives us the wisdom to see it for ourselves.