

Two economic issues loom especially large in the United States today: widespread economic insecurity and soaring levels of income inequality. Last week, with morbid fascination, I found myself glued to the TV to learn how Donald Trump and the Republican Party were going to help alleviate this growing problem. What I learned instead was that, in their worldview, our country is a decrepit post-apocalyptic wasteland where roving gangs of marauders target innocent civilians, where crime is out of control and where people are being mowed down in the streets.

After hearing all that I jumped into bed, pulled the covers over my head and started sucking my thumb. Within a few minutes I felt better, came to my senses and started re-reading an article I read several years ago called the Fate of Empires by John Glubb. He looked at the rise and fall of empires for the past 4000 years and found that the same patterns kept constantly repeating themselves under widely differing conditions of climate, culture and religion. According to Glubb everything that we are seeing today has happened again and again..... and again.

As we pass through life, ideally we are supposed to learn from our experiences and correct our behavior as we age. I know I flinch when I think about some of the stupid things I did and said in my youth. I have learned from my past mistakes for which my wife is eternally grateful. In like manner shouldn't our nation also endeavor to avoid the mistakes made by our predecessors? I'm old enough to remember Senator Joseph McCarthy and the harm he brought to our country as he pointed his finger at anyone who disagreed with his worldview.

John Glubb found that after approximately 250 years empires deteriorated into what he called the “Age of Decadence.” Decadence, from his perspective, was due to too long of a period of wealth and power as well as selfishness, love of money and loss of a sense of duty. Defensiveness, pessimism, materialism, the welfare state and a weakening of religious principles also define it.

Does any of that sound familiar?

In our present state of mental chaos we divide ourselves into nations, parties or communities and fight, hate and vilify one another over circumstances that may be completely uncontrollable and inevitable according to Glubb. John Glubb and I part ways at the inevitability of our present situation. My question is can we pull back from the age of decadence and rebuild our economy on a stronger more ecological foundation and return to the age of affluence and intellect.

The question we all need to consider, as we listen over the next four months to politicians promising the moon, pandering and flat out lying is how do we rebuild our nation and move towards a sustainable future that is compatible with the realities of the 21st Century.