

Wilderness House Literary Review 14/1

Douglas Hawley
Amnesia

I 'VE HAD CLINICAL AMNESIA, but it was relatively insignificant. Some other cases have been earth shaking. Let's start with a lesson ignored or forgotten to the present day. The Smoot-Hawley Act of 1930 started a trade war and according to Wikipedia it was catastrophic. There is general consensus that it contributed to the Great Depression. Subsequently, raising tariffs have been tried and failed on many occasions, including as it is currently being used by the US president who seems to think that he is a good business man. Classic economics has always held that people and countries should usually buy the cheapest regardless of where it originates, making tariffs counterproductive.

I don't think that Representative Willis C. Hawley of Oregon, the Hawley of Smoot-Hawley is related to me.

Variations of the tulip mania or bubble continue to recur with maddening frequency. The tulip bubble occurred in the Netherlands in the 1600s when for complex reasons which can be found elsewhere, tulips became overvalued – the extent is not clear – until their value fell. During the dot-com bubble of 1995-2000, many people lost all their money (much like the tulip buyers) going into debt buying money-losing companies' stock that had .com in their names.

The Great Recession of 2007-2009 (official dates, but the hurt lasted well beyond 2009) had many causes, but one was the implicit belief that home prices always go up despite many counterexamples. We bought our current house in 2003 and after we moved in, home buying was so aggressive, and competition to buy so high that some people were putting up "Not for sale" signs in their yards. Of course house prices don't always go up, and over-leveraging was a big part of the recession. Both banks and buyers were guilty, because of the infamous "liar loans". We are wondering if the next bubble is starting, because we have gotten several approaches recently from agents wanting to sell our house.

In the 1960s the US got heavily involved in fighting in Viet Nam, which ended in severe damage to both countries. In the 1990s multi-cultural Yugoslavia began its disintegration after dictator Tito died. You might think that anyone conscious in the 1960s would conclude that it would be a bad idea to invade a multi-cultural country in Asia and depose its dictator. It was a bad idea, but the US leaders at that time must have had amnesia when both President Bushes decided to invade Iraq. It seems that Saddam Hussein was our friend, in part because Iraq had oil and he was the enemy of our enemy Iran (side note – thinking that the enemy of our enemy is our friend is a truly bad idea). Using poison gas against Iran and killing his local opponents was not a serious enough offense for the US to depose him, but invading Kuwait was.

Many Americans have declared the despicable current president (I don't use his name) the worst ever and seem to have no idea how small his body count is compared to his predecessors, including two Bushes, a Johnson and a Nixon.

Prophets are continually praying on people's fears of end times, some-

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times for monetary gain. Regardless of how many have falsely predicted the date for Armageddon, at least a few will believe the next prediction. Remember Heaven's Gate?

In recent years we have heard about reaching the end of the age of irony (Graydon Carter) after the 9-1-1 terrorism. Of course it wasn't anything like the end of irony. After the "too soon" time was over for comedians, life went on as usual. Likewise, as long as there are people alive, there will be no end to history (Francis Fukuyama to the contrary). After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the world went from two dominant powers to everybody for himself, not such a huge change, and most lives were unchanged. When Rome or Mongolia either rose or declined were people talking about the end of history? If they thought of it, they were probably too smart for such grandiose pronouncements.

My personal amnesia started on a normal day for me, March 31, 2018. It was another stewardship day removing ivy in the local Tryon Park, something I had done perhaps a thousand times. After driving home, I had lost so much memory that I thought Barrack Obama was still president and I didn't know what year it was. After alarming my editor, she took me to the emergency room. I was tested for stroke or other brain damage, but they found nothing (brain joke). After being there for about five hours, I was released. The next day I was more or less normal. The doctors said I had idiopathic (medical for "we don't know") transient global amnesia which seems to happen randomly and may not recur. Perhaps I should be concerned, but because it is something over which I have no control, I am not.

I must be all right now because I haven't bought any dot-com stock or tulips and the neurologist said that my brain wasn't bad for an old man. Images showed a few holes which explains why I can never remember the weather forecast.

For over fifty years I never listened closely to the song "Where Have All The Flowers Gone". In the last year I noticed that it is a loop in that the end of the song is also the beginning. The implied answer to the repeated "When will they ever learn" is "never".

Wikipedia was used as a source for parts of this article.