*"Restoring Global Hope: An Essay on a World Lacking Optimism during Dark Times"*

By: Juan Franco

It is no secret that America is facing one of its worst periods in History; economic depressions, political revolutions, horrifying natural disasters and a series of issues ranging from illegal immigration to the legalization of marijuana just add more spice to this overcooked plate. Can we really be facing the death of the "American Dream"; can hope be really fading away? Does hope have an expiration date? Although I don’t believe so, the entire world certainly seems to.

The beacon of democracy, the ray of freedom and the place where dreams come true; all this being definitions the world has used to describe the United States of America. So to fully understand our lack of hope; why not begin in the place where hope was born: America. “America is not just a country but a way". What exactly does it mean to do it the "American Way"? Does it still mean to buy a Ford and listen to the Radio or does it mean to work in New York City and make $100,000 (plus benefits)? America keeps evolving to match the new world that it ultimately rules. In my time here I have completely changed my perspective on Americans. I'm not talking about the "McDonald Americans", I’m fully aware that a society goes beyond the Fast Food Industry, but America the rich and powerful. I sincerely though that this was the land of opportunity, and don't get me wrong it still is, but it’s not as pretty as it seems. America has become grayer, not in reference to age, but it has certainly lost the many colors that composed the American society. People are just not that optimistic or "American" if we dare use that adjective. And to prove this I conducted a poll among Drury University freshmen in relevance to issues that impact their lives. When asked who was better along economically speaking between China and the United States, 82% said China. 56% said that the United States was on the wrong track against a 44% that said yes. It’s basically a shout from the American people saying that they had had enough of the old United States, but is it enough to get back to work and restore the American glory? Hopefully the answer is yes, but it can be a little too late for Hope.

The same questions were applied to International Students here at Drury and the results were surprisingly different.  61% said that the United States was better of economically than China. A shocking 77% concluded that the United States is on the right track. So what this means is that the rest of the world still consider the US the land of opportunity, but Americans themselves are not seeing the same thing. How is it then that we can turn things around? I'm honest enough to admit that I’m not necessarily fit to answer this question; I don't hold any higher level degrees or have any real work experience to grant me this "power". But further analyzing this problem I arrived to the conclusion that that the answer doesn't really lie between the enlightened ones. The New United States, and the new global society will rise from the young.

I accept the fact that young people are not the usual prospects we turn to, especially under pressure, to find success, but it is vital that everyone understands that these young people, each and every one of us sitting in this room, are the face of a better, innovation-based, always-positive world, and this is not a question but a statement. I'm talking about commoners mostly, the Missouri girl who once dreamed on becoming a college athlete and now must face reality and decided to pursue a career nursing, the Ecuadorian who dreams of becoming an Architect and constructing a new home country, the German pre-med student who dreams of treating the entire world, the Mexican tennis player who took on communications in search of a new dream, the teacher who inspired change in her students, the Venezuelan politics student who believes he can change the world with words and hoping. This is the New Global order. Politics have little to do with the issue, real change lies within the people, not the few that rule. This people will not follow pre-decided guidelines, the time to quote from our "founding fathers" has passed.

In my most humble opinion here's how to fix America and the world:

* Embrace education as the key towards success. 3 out of every 4 Americans students polled could not name the capital of Iraq, a country currently under American occupation (in contrast with a 2 out of 3 international students that actually knew Baghdad to be the Iraqi capital). This number is not intended to radicalize Americans in any way, but to highlight that we need to make more efforts in informing regular citizens on something as common as where over 100,000 "sons and daughters" have been sent to fight for freedom. When asked to name one country that sponsors terrorism one of the most common answers included Afghanistan and the option that ”No Country in the World supports terrorism”; again lacking information on where soldiers are sent since the Afghan Government is neither permitted to sponsor terrorists due to the American troops in Kabul or was it included in the "State that Sponsor Terrorism" list released by the State Department. Again this is not revealed to induce a feeling of ignorance, but as a plea to use education as the way forward. It may sound simple and infantile, but an educated person almost always makes better choices and reasons in a much more effective way. And that’s a fact
* Believe it or not, place trust in the Governments. Yes, I know I said that people bring on the real change, but the Government ends up making up nearly all decisions (I’m not suggesting we turn to Anarchy here!) so we must assure our trust in our elected officials. Previously I said this is almost never about Politics, and I continue to support that! This is not about writing bills or debates in the Senate, but about believing in who actually represents you; who can actually talk to the leader of this nation about your issues. However I am not asking to place blind trust in some, probably corrupt politician thousand of miles away in the capital; absolutely not. Become a more aware person, this is not an issue on becoming “smarter” but on becoming a citizen of the world. Whether it is a King or a President, you must realize that he or she symbolizes your nation abroad. Place your trust in him or her, only after you come to the conclusion he is worth your trust. “The People should not fear their Governments, Governments should fear their people, because it is they who gave them their power”
* Return to that 4th of July feeling, return to that feeling of pride for your country, that feeling that makes tears come to your eyes as you see your flag waving in the wind. God Bless America used to be a rally for a feeling of pleasure in the US something that has lost power locally and something that should become even more powerful abroad. It is time to feel proud about America and each of the countries of the world once again. America specifically needs to be reminded that they have upheld the value of freedom and democracy, needless to say not an easy fit. Lady Liberty does not stand proud and tall all by herself, millions of Americans contributed to this achievement.
* Time for New Furniture. America and many parts of the world have always been for the old way, conservative values over innovation. Old traditionalist values must be replaced with that makes the world a better place. How is it that cities like Abu Dhabi (U.A.E), Singapore, Doha (Qatar), Taipei (Taiwan) and Seoul (South Korea) strive during awful times? They are constantly innovating and that is vital in a moment where the past is not as trusted. Innovation is the key to the future.
* The following piece of advice is limited to America, since I don’t feel this situation applies to every single country across the world. Yes, America is Great, but don't push it. It is a common perception that Americans show off their super-power label, if you want America to be better, you must definitely make foreigners feel better about it. They make up a huge part of what America is.
* Accept Diversity. This country is not a country of one race, it’s a conglomeration of many different, nationalities, ethnicities and religions that joined under the star and stripes to protect liberty and freedom. More than once have I heard an "American" complain when they see that products have instructions in other languages than English, this is not wrong, this is just American. And don't you forget that. However, the world must learn that we can not just come to America and take advantage of its benefits and not pay the consequences. If Arizona passes a tougher immigration law, it is because of something. We must adapt to the American way, without really loosing our identity.
* And last but not least, we need to address the issue of hope. My dear friends never lose hope. Yes, there are times when things look bad, but remember this: It is always darkest before sunrise, meaning that things will get better, but it will be horrible right before that; and history is proof of that. After WWII, the deadliest conflict in history, the world reconstructed. Building a better place for its global citizens. Innovation took over and we saw the greatest rebirth ever.

As you can see most suggestions are not an actual action, but a way of thinking. It has to be more of a psychological and philosophical revolution than a physical one. We must change inside, so that we can become a role model for everyone. Even though it is not easy, people like us must make sacrifices today so a better future is ensured. Change is so important that I don’t care if it doesn’t come in huge forms; just a little bit every day makes me happy. But we must never let go of this dream, because dreaming is the only thing we can always count for sure. This is an ever changing world, and we are right here leading the change.