

Living in an Imperial World

by [Karen Kwiatkowski](#)

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The republic is dead. Not sick, not dying, not failing, or in a gradual decline, not waiting to be resuscitated, but already stone cold dead.

This death probably occurred as we began to win the Cold War, but long before we realized we had prevailed. The professionalization of politics, of military and bureaucratic service to the state, of foreign policy making, and of business seems to have completely done in the old ideas. Simply federated, decentralized, self-depreciating government that once feared the people has self-actualized into a contemptuous, rapacious and iron-fisted murderer of freedom, and murderer of men.

Perhaps the 1989 movie *Weekend at Bernie's* was really the American political saga, and we never knew.

The founders worried that subsequent elites and factions would take over the republic they had birthed with every aspect of their power, as the gifted political elites of their time. Yet, as the 19th century dawned, even the most pro-state among them loved freedom and hated tyranny.

They were right about government power and human nature, and their predictions true. New elites and government-dependent factions have ascended. Unfortunately, these political elites hate freedom and love the tyranny of government solutions.

One of many truths [Ron Paul's campaign](#) is revealing is how hated real liberty is among the powers that be, how despised the individual, and how all-encompassing the contempt with which modern power brokers in Washington and New York hold the principles of the founders.

Americans who care about the existence of an American republic are many, and those who love freedom are many more. Again, the fantastic and political wisdom-slashing adventure of the Ron Paul campaign stands witness to the fact that sheer passion for liberty remains a vibrant force in American life. But this passion, this life, is nowhere to be found in American government, nowhere to be found in the state, or in the empire.

There seems to be no effective way to save or restore the republic, no way for any individual to even begin to solve the problem of our late 20th and early 21st century imperialism. I tend to agree, and the wisest observers in these pages warn, as [Chris Floyd does](#), "It is pointless – and counterproductive – to simply throw yourself under the wheels of such a monstrous machine in futile spasms of rage and despair. The machine doesn't care. It will gladly chew up your life and move on."

All this presumes that an American republic is still viable – not really dead, just severely weakened and in need of strong salts and a booster shot.

A book I read a few years ago, entitled [Deep Survival](#), by Laurence Gonzales, offers a helpful perspective on our current condition. In studying the question of who lives and who dies in extreme survival conditions, Gonzales found that survivors shared a sense that, in fact, they were not going to live. While they wanted to live, to go home again, and to be secure – they recognized that they were so royally and absolutely FUBAR'ed that they would die, probably quickly and perhaps horribly.

Now, obviously those who actually died in these disasters could not be interviewed, but the behaviors and actions of those who lived and those who died were measurably different. The survivors recognized the ugly truth of their own imminent death quickly – and this early recognition of reality – however harsh and frightful and depressing it may have been – was also at once incredibly liberating, in some ways exhilarating.

The survivors tended to reach this point of reality sooner than did the victims. They grieved for themselves, their hoped-for futures, their now impossible dreams. Then they rolled up their sleeves and got started on the hard, and very likely pointless, work of survival.

Rules were abandoned – what could be eaten, what could be learned, what could be done, and what could be considered. Old ideas of personal capabilities and limitations were gradually discarded. Prayer became real and palpable rather than formalized and pious.

The idea of "living each day as if it were the last" is sometimes suggested to remind us to be loving and kind, yet it also hints at the value of self-indulgence, impulsivity and risk-taking. But when each day really might be your last – the behavior of survivors seems to be far more practical, far more thoughtful for the future, far more truthful about what one really needs, and quietly courageous without flamboyant risk-seeking.

Recognition of reality is liberating. When Jesus said, "the Truth will set you free," I'm not sure he was directly speaking of the governments of men. But recognizing the unreality of a once treasured concept – in our American case, a vibrant past and future republic, may in fact free us to do what we need to do.

"And what is that, exactly?" you ask.

Recognize that the republic is dead, and that we owe its rotting bloated corpse no loyalty whatsoever.

This done, act accordingly. Publicly and privately, we should observe the corpse as a public nuisance, a pollutant both aesthetically and materially. When the yellow brick road leads us to the grand doors of government services, we should not avert our gaze but instead pull back the curtain, grandly, loudly, with the contagious laughter of a child, or the righteous anger of a soldier back in pieces from a war, like most wars, that was from the beginning a brutal political lie.

Will we insult a federal or state employee, a law enforcer or judge? Will we anger a politician, a lobbyist, a corporatist employer, or a government news organ for stealing our lives, our freedom of movement and thought, our productivity? We should certainly aspire to do so, with the zeal of missionaries.

To live in an imperial world, we must first, as survivors, recognize that it is an imperial world. History is filled with imperial/totalitarian states, as global graveyards are filled with those who were too late in recognizing what had already happened.

It's over. The faithful and the hopeful may carry the corpse of the American republic, hoping that it can be brought back into normality, into life, and into power. I am afraid these nurturers will not survive the present reality of imperialism.

But some of us will look directly at the ugly, dangerous and very real empire. We will stare – with little hope but also with little fear – into the face of the FUBAR nation, and then roll up our sleeves and get started on the only life we may honestly live, as internal dissidents. We will no longer pledge allegiance, we will not obey old rules, we will make do and make it up as we go along. Our minds focused on surviving the empire, our talents and creativity unleashed against the state and its fantasist faithful, we will live as if we are free.

This simple prescription will not only make us survivors, but it will gradually cultivate a political landscape for a future of free republics where today we see nascent totalitarianism and bankrupt empire. This prescription was written for us in 1809 by revolutionary war general John Stark. He advised, "Live free or die. Death is not the worst of evils."

We face a modern American state more overweening and dictatorial than even King George III could imagine, yet we have no declaration of independence, no privileged elite to demand it, no interested population to read and debate it. This time, our declaration will be made individually, every day, in calm desperate fearlessness, as we simply live free.

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