

# The Best Way to Fight Political Hysteria

The week after Halloween, my first-grade grandson asked if I was afraid of monsters.

“Only human ones,” I said. The confusion on his face alerted me to shift gears. “No, I’m not afraid of monsters. The older you get, the less you are afraid of monsters.”

He paused, then asked: “Are you afraid of tomatoes?”

That one sent me into a tailspin of laughter. “Tomatoes?”

“Uh-huh.”

“No, I’m not afraid of tomatoes.”

Where did that question come from? Had my grandson seen some zombie tomatoes on Veggie Tales hunting down innocent carrots and terrified squash?

His questions got me to thinking about our current state of political hysteria and other incidents of overblown fears I had witnessed in the last fifty years.

Here are just a few examples.

In the late 1960s, Paul and Anne Ehrlich published *The Population Bomb*, which predicted global starvation in the next two decades. Never happened.

Older readers may remember the Alar apple scare in the 1980s, when a chemical sprayed on apples was going to give everyone cancer or some such thing. False alarm.

In the 1970s, the mainstream media reported we were entering a new Ice Age. (Many scientists disagreed.) Now we are told the planet is heating up.

Some commentators thirty years ago predicted a massive outbreak of AIDS among heterosexual men and women. Again, never happened.

Then there was the egg crisis. A pediatrician told a woman I know that if he had his way, he would ban eggs from grocery store shelves. They were killers. Now we know eggs are healthy.

Is cholesterol bad for us? Who knows? Some studies say "bad" cholesterol is bad for you, while other more recent investigations find no correlation between cholesterol and heart disease.

Remember the hysteria about fast food restaurants several years ago? MacDonald's and Burger King were making us fat. (I have to say I eat at Mickey D's once every month or so. Money is tight, and where else can I get a chicken sandwich for a dollar? Want to avoid the calories? Just ask them to hold the mayo.) Hey, take some responsibility. No one held a gun to your head and forced you to eat three Big Macs for lunch every day the last five years.

Cases of political hysteria are rife as well.

Ronald Regan was going to initiate World War III.

Bill Clinton would make us socialists.

Bush II was an idiot who shouldn't be driving a pickup, much less the country.

Barack Obama was a communist.

Donald Trump is a Nazi.

On and on it goes:

– A rape culture exists on our college campuses. (No, but a drinking culture does exist on campuses, which drives many of these sexual incidents.)

– Americans of all races are themselves racist to the core. (So let me ask my readers: do you consider yourself racist?)

– The Catholic priesthood is rife with child molesters. (False.)

– People who own guns are evil. (Not even close.)

– We live in a violent society. (Violent crime has fallen sharply in the last twenty-five years.)

– American women are victims. (How so?)

My dad, God bless him, spent the last years of his life gardening, watching Fox News, and drinking martinis. When you watch Fox, or any other network news, for six hours a day, of course you will believe, as Dad did, our society is going to hell in a handbag.

Here's a suggestion regarding our present anxiety. How about if we each just said to ourselves, "I will no longer live in fear because some commentator with an ax to grind thinks the world is coming to an end. Instead, I will engage with my neighbors and loved ones. I may even take a walk on the wild side and order that chicken sandwich."

We should fight when we can or must against real enemies. From

conviction or fear, or both, we should fight. Agreed. We should also keep abreast of our ongoing cultural battles. Agreed again. Otherwise, let's quit making headlines into fearful gods and revel in the wonders offered by our everyday world.

As for those horrific tomatoes, my dear grandson, let's slice 'em up, slap 'em between some white bread decked out with some mayo and pepper, and enjoy an old-fashioned Southern treat.

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