

BROCK'S BANTER: Captive on the carousel of time

By Brock Weir

Recently, a friend with some degree of knowledge of my educational background asked me the following question: "As a man of history, how do you explain 2016 in the bigger picture?"

Unless you have recently come back from a year-long spiritual retreat in a remote, forbidding environment where your only contact with the outside world was a helicopter overhead periodically dropping a non-perishable care package to keep you among the living, you will surely understand that that is one hell of a loaded question.

As a "man of history"? I had no idea where to even begin formulating my answer. The best I could do, in a pinch, was "everything is cyclical."

Looking back over the last few days, I am sure in the knowledge that my answer was less than satisfactory to the man asking the question but it seemed true at the time.

We have seen the rise of purported "everymen" who are anything but, individuals who tap into a well of anger and dissatisfaction to reap their own rewards to the ultimate detriment of the individuals who embolden them. Throughout our history we have faced waves of people who embolden themselves by selling commodities of fear and mistrust through creating "the other." And, needless to say to members of alarmingly recent generations, we have seen foreign political intrigues and machinations that have come to define an age.

We have also seen the eventual collapses of the snake oil salesmen, once they have done untold damage, and once their base ultimately realises they have blindly swallowed the stuff without reading the health label. We have seen the walls built to "protect" against the so-called "other" crumble under the weight of its own falsehood thanks in no small part to the sheer grit and determination of those who sensed it right from the start. And, of course, we have seen the political machine play out.

But, there's something different in the air.

The more I thought about it, the less cyclical it ultimately appeared.

We're in uncharted territory.

Last week, Conservative leadership candidate Lisa Raitt took aim at her fellow candidate Kellie Leitch denouncing the latter's unlikely adoption of Trump-style politics in a country where many of us, I think, are all too comfy and cozy in our winter finery to think such political bile could ever find traction in a nation such as ours.

But, as we've snuggled up in our collective smugness, Leitch has tapped into that energy source, leaving others like Raitt to fight the fight.

While Raitt and other Conservative candidates are fighting back, there seems to be an alarming level of complacency engulfing our southern neighbours.

As I considered whether or not what is unfolding right now is truly cyclical, I considered the last 60 years. In the 1950s, people in the southern United States were fighting for desegregation. In the 1960s, the Civil Rights movement reached fever pitch along with those fighting against the fighting in Vietnam.

The following decade brought intense political engagement with the Watergate scandal and those clamoring to reclaim their democracy. Now, however, when it is clear that the very democracy they have held so dear has quite literally been hijacked by an old foe, there is little more than crickets outside of a few armchair politicians venting their spleens on social media.

Perhaps they will come during next Friday's inauguration, but there are no swarms of people taking to the streets demanding their democracy back. There are no mass demonstrations. Organizations are not springing up. People are simply looking up, briefly expressing their outrage, and then going back to posting their wacky cat videos online.

The one unlikely clarion call in all of this? Meryl Streep.

For many of you, Monday's watercooler talk was undoubtedly the impassioned and politically charged speech made by Streep at Sunday night's Golden Globe awards when she picked up the Cecil B. DeMille Lifetime Achievement Award from the Hollywood Foreign Press Association.

Using her time in the pulpit, she took direct aim at the current political climate, explaining her own heartbreak at the mocking of the disabled New York Times reporter.

"It sank its hooks into my heart not because it was good ? there was nothing good about it ? but it was effective and it did its job," she said. "It made its intended audience laugh and show their teeth?and this instinct to humiliate, when it is modeled by someone in the public platform, by someone powerful, it filters down into everybody's life, because it kind of gives permission for other people

to do the same thing. Disrespect invites disrespect, violence incites violence. And when the powerful use their position to bully others we all lose.?

Her target was clear, but Streep's themes have universal applications. She is right that the tactics employed in the situation she reference did its trick. It tapped into its target quite nicely and got them to show their teeth and galvanized their movement. It has given other people a tacit ?permission? to do the same, but inaction also breeds this permissiveness.

Those not left ?showing their teeth? were left behind, let their guard down ? and look what happened.

Violence incites violence, sure. That is a no-brainer because, as the saying goes, an eye for an eye leaves the whole world blind.

And, disrespect, of course, also invites disrespect. But, complacency too invites disrespect. If you don't have the passion to stand up for what you believe in, you will ultimately be walked on or be all too eager to show your teeth when someone else offers to do the heavy lifting for you.

Over the next few years, both in the United States and in Canada, it will be interesting to see what ? if anything ? ultimately spurs people to sit up, take notice and defend the issues and principles that matter to them. Only time will tell if they do so while those issues and principles are still at hand, or whether they are looking longingly back at them through the lens of a man or woman of history.