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# America still great: a nation of 'soreheads'

**By GARRISON KEILLOR**  
*The New York Times*

The voters are angry. There was a front page story in The New York Times last week about this — "For Voters, Hope Gives Way to Anger, Fear and Cynicism" — in which an anesthesiologist in Savannah and a retired firefighter in Richmond each announced that he is thinking of moving to Costa Rica because of how bad things are in the USA these days.

The anesthesiologist said that, in 10 years, it won't be economically feasible to live in this country. The retired firefighter said the tax laws are more favorable in Costa Rica, you can raise your children as you see fit, and you can defend yourself and your property.

The retired firefighter, the story said, is 53 years old, and one might point out that some of the taxes that make him angry pay the pensions of public employees who get to retire earlier than most of us, but never mind that.

As for the anesthesiologist, I had always thought it was a line of work that paid liberally well, well enough to pay your bills, but perhaps I was wrong.

I do think that if these angry voters believe that America is on the rocks and that God bless them and grant them generous tax advantages, and if the anesthesiologist wants to learn how to say, "Count backward from 100" in Spanish, then God speed.

But shouldn't someone warn the Costa Ricans that these men are coming? Does Costa Rica really need a lot of Republican boat people with all their high expectations of what society owes them?

The article is very illuminating. It says the angry, cynical voters are themselves doing OK financially and don't seem to be upset about specific issues. The voters' anger, say opinion polls, is due to uncertainty about the future and a feeling that they aren't getting ahead.

How can one say this diplomatically? In the adult segment of your life, Angry Voter, in the part of your life that comes after your parents kiss you goodbye and kick you out, the future is always uncertain. Even in the past, the future was uncertain, and it always will be.

And if you don't get ahead, you aren't entitled to blame the president, the Congress, or your poor old mom and dad. This is true even in Costa Rica. I thought everybody knew this.

Another voter in the article, a businesswoman in Oakland, said, "There's a sense that the system is broken."

Perhaps there is such a sense, but if you want to see what a broken system looks like, check out Haiti or Iraq.

Back in the Vietnam era, people talked a blue streak about the system being broken — but was it? Water came out of the tap, your toilet flushed, the buses ran, the schools taught your kids, you paid your taxes, the mailman came.

What else is the system supposed to do for you? It can't come to your home and blow your nose. You have to do that yourself, my dear.

This is the age of the dumbing of America, and, frankly, the cynicism of people who are rowing with one oar is not of great interest.

Everyone I know who ever took a trip to Washington and got a firsthand look at government came away impressed with the workings of it and not inclined to seek exile in Costa Rica.

But are there three newspapers in America that cover Congress with anything like the thoroughness and fair that they bring to their coverage of the NFL?

Newspapers are keenly aware of a younger generation of non-readers that does not care whether it sees a newspaper in the morning or not, and newspapers are trying to appeal to this generation by writing down to it.

In the mind of a not very bright 14-year-old, the entire adult world consists of dolts and jerks and meanies, and that is how reporters tend to write about government these days.

Look at the carpet-chewing editorials and the gothic conspiracy tales that have come down on the president in the past year. Can you blame the American voter for believing some of what he or she reads?

We are becoming a nation of soreheads, and so this fall we probably will go to the polls and shoot ourselves in the foot.

Good for us, I say. I say the Angry Cynical Voters should elect a Congress of pinheads, nincompoops and radio talk-show hosts, and then in 1996 they should elect Newt Gingrich to be our angry, cynical president.

He and the Congress can cut taxes in half, triple defense spending, build a naval base in the Okkeefenoek Swamp, require all public schools to teach the doctrine of original sin and follow nincompoopery wherever it leads them.

Elect the worst Congress you can find, and the system still will not break, and we won't go to Costa Rica.

America will still be a great country, despite angry cynical voters.

That is the great thing about America. It's bigger than we think.

Garrison Keillor is author, most recently, of "The Book of Guys."