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Fixing up America By Larry Matthews BC Guest Commentator

Quite by accident, I recently found myself listening to Rush Limbaugh on the radio. Like many people, I see Limbaugh as a cigar smoking windbag whose world is limited to other wealthy far, far right nutbags whose connections to the world everyone else lives in were cut long ago. As it happened, on this day he was revisiting the 1930s, a glorious time for the truly wealthy. While everyone else was huddled in a soup line, these folks were driving expensive cars and wondering why Franklin Roosevelt was President.

Limbaugh allowed as how America really began its downward slide to socialism during FDR's administration. Now, given that it's the 21st Century you might expect the far right to offer a more contemporary argument, but these folks aren't called conservatives for nothing. As the saying goes, you can tell what kind of conservative someone is by the year they want to go back to.

Hot on the heels of Limbaugh's trip down memory lane was Ken Burn's documentary, *The Dust Bowl*, broadcast on PBS, about the awful period during the 1930s when the Plains states suffered through horrific periods of drought and dust storms of Biblical proportions. It was during this period that Americans starved to death, died of what was known as "dust pneumonia", lost their farms, and lost their hope. The social programs of FDR saved the lives of tens of thousands of Americans by offering food, shelter, and work. The government admitted that its agriculture policies had caused the problem of the Dust Bowl and worked out a solution, one that would take many years to take effect.

Fast forward to today. Government is vilified as some kind of evil force that must be cast aside to make way for "liberty" and "opportunity." We know whose liberty and opportunity we're talking about and it's not the Americans on the margins.

Now is precisely the time to revisit FDR and examine what worked in the 1930s and what didn't. What worked was the government as keeper of the nation's pride. Let's not forget that the New Deal wasn't simply a handout. Roads were built. Dams were constructed. Art was produced. The men who worked for the WPA put in a hard day's work for their twenty-five dollars a month. They were given back their lives and the nation's infrastructure was expanded. How is that evil?

This country is literally falling apart. It's not just the social fabric or the economy. Our national electric grid was given only a D+ by the American Society of Civil Engineers. Millions of Americans go days without power following storms; that will only increase in strength and number as the planet warms. We're entering Third World status as the wealthiest Americans install their own generators, just like the grandees of Pakistan and India.

Internationally, our infrastructure is ranked 23rd in the world, behind not only the advanced European countries but such nations as Oman and Barbados. We are just ahead of Chile and Namibia. We are 16th on the Subjective Well-being list of ninety-seven nations, behind such nations as El Salvador but ahead of Guatemala. The happiest people, as it turns out, live in Denmark, followed by Puerto Rico.

We already know our school system is failing. Our aging water treatment and sewage systems are ripe for disaster, as we've been warned for years. Our national parks are growing shabby. Foreign visitors shake their heads at the condition of our major airports. The only viable passenger train service is in the Northeast, where the tracks are in such rough shape the trains are forced to travel below advertised speeds.

The solution is so obvious as to be laughable, if it weren't for the likes of Limbaugh and those who pay any attention to what they have to say. The hard truth is the programs of FDR not only saved America but made the country better. It is a blueprint for today.

The country is falling apart. Americans need work. Fixing up America means jobs. Jobs mean pride and prosperity. The truth is Ronald

Reagan was dead wrong. The government is not the problem. The government is the solution.

It was true in the 1930s and it's true now. This land is your land.

BlackCommentator.com Guest Commentator, Larry Matthews, is a veteran broadcast journalist. He is the recipient of The George Foster Peabody Award for Excellence in Broadcast for his reporting on Vietnam veterans. He is also the recipient of a Columbia/DuPont Citation, Society of Professional Journalists, Associated Press, and other awards for investigative reporting. He is the author of [five books](#) including, I Used To Be In Radio: a Memoir. Click [here](#) to reach Mr. Matthews.



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