

## Quixotic Dreams for Another Century

By Dennis Payton Knight

“To Dream the Impossible Dream” is an inspiring song with lyrics by Joe Darion from the musical, *Man of La Mancha*. The play is based on one of the greatest novels ever written, a two volume seventeenth century tale by Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra. It is known in full as *The Ingenious Gentleman Don Quixote of La Mancha*.

It is the story of an unnamed Spaniard of the minor noble rank of hidalgo who loses his sanity and decides to set out to revive chivalry, undo wrongs, and bring justice to the world. He takes the name of Don Quixote, and recruits a farmer, Sancho Panza, as his squire and sidekick.

In one chapter, Quixote calls Sancho to see “forty hulking giants over yonder,” declaring his intention to “do battle with them and slay them... for this is a righteous war and the removal of so foul a brood from off the face of the earth is a service God will bless.”

"Take care, sir," cried Sancho. "Those over there are not giants but windmills."

Hence, those of us who are dreamers by nature are seen to be quixotic, meaning we are hopeful or romantic in a way that is not practical. We dream impossible dreams and reach for unreachable stars, and our belief in justice, dignity and peace for those with whom we share space on Earth may be quixotic. If so, it is our wont to “run where the brave dare not go, to right the unrightable wrong.”

There have been dreamers before us. Abraham Lincoln, debating Stephen Douglas two years before his election, argued, “Most governments have been based... on the denial of the equal rights of men...; ours began, by affirming those rights.” He was referring to those dreamers who framed our constitution in the century before his. Lincoln, a dreamer himself, was elected to advance those constitutional rights, yet his election provoked a civil war that nearly destroyed the country.

In 1963, Martin Luther King had a quixotic dream that inspired generations of Americans to deal with each other fairly, justly and perhaps without prejudice. The election in 2008 of a black man to be President of the United States was an event that profoundly affirmed the impractical dreams of Jefferson, Adams, Lincoln, and Martin Luther King. And even if those dreams remain yet unfulfilled, the election of Barack Obama proved they are indeed possible.

Is a peaceful Earth a dream only to sing about at Christmas? Or is that possible too? Cynics who believe only in things practical will say no. But maybe it is but a matter of laying down arms in our communities, one by one, not by dint of law, but because we have begun to realize in a common, if quixotic way that “The world will be better for this, that one man, scorned and covered with scars, still strove with his last ounce of courage, to reach the unreachable star.”