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## Make Way For Angels

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Concluding his First Inaugural Address, President Abraham Lincoln expressed his hope for a resurgence of "the better angels of our nature."

As national unity dissolved in 1861, those angels were ducking for cover and rarely to be seen. And even though our own times cannot match 1861 in peril, our angels seem at the moment to be heading for the hills.

Therefore, on this holiday weekend, I take the opportunity to propose some new holidays in the hope of encouraging "the better angels of our nature" to come out of hiding and give us a hand.

Alas, the very fact that I have used a metaphor associated with a particular religious tradition has probably damaged my cause.

In the last week, I have received numerous helpful (if also rather harsh!) messages informing me that by characterizing myself as a "recovering secular humanist," I gave the injurious impression that I thought secular humanism was an affliction comparable to alcoholism. By bringing up angels, I seem to be acting on an odd desire to receive a second round of impassioned messages exhorting me to shun phrasing that seems to exalt religious belief.

This brings us to my first proposed holiday. Take a Deep Breath Day will involve a simple activity: when we do not succeed at saying exactly what we mean in certifiably inoffensive terms, our fellow citizens will forswear the usual fun of pouncing and denouncing, and give us a second chance.

Based on the current national mood, it seems likely that following this practice on one day a year will exhaust us. But it will still be good exercise for those angels.

And this brings us to Blame Day. It will be your civic obligation to spend this day blaming each and every person you encounter. On Blame Day, no one will take responsibility for anything, and everyone will devote the day to accusing everyone else of being the source of our afflictions.

Of course, you are now wondering how we will distinguish Blame Day from every other day of our lives. Here is the difference: on this holiday, you have to alternate speaking and listening. Everyone you speak to will be blaming you for everything, but then your accuser has to keep quiet while you return the favor.

At a certain point during this festive day, casting blame will begin to get a little tiresome. So on the following day, called Time to Move On Day, Americans will be ready to admit that if we were all so successful in blaming one another, the lesson must surely be clear. Since we were all complicit in the production of the problems, we must all play a part in the production of their solutions. Thus we are set free to devote the year until the next Blame Day actually assessing our problems and figuring out what we can do to correct them.

Liberated by these holidays, the better angels of our nature will, I hope, oversee a cutback in the current enthusiasm for reciprocal demonization. As I know from my own earlier practices, when you are able to pretend that life is simple and to throw yourself into the full-speed-ahead demonizing of those whose practices and convictions you find abhorrent, life is very pleasant indeed.

Feeling pure, self-righteous, smug and nestled in the company of the likeminded is one of humanity's greatest natural highs. Every once in a while, I miss it. But I also remember the feeling of the hangover setting in after the high.

And that brings us to Take Posterity to Lunch Day. Our better angels are often defeated by our inability to think in larger units of time than the next election cycle or the next quarterly report, and to believe in the reality of posterity.

So observers of this holiday will go out to lunch and sit singly at their tables. But there will be a placemat, silverware, a glass of water and a menu at an empty seat at each table. While you eat your solitary lunch, you are to make your best efforts to imagine a representative from posterity occupying the empty seat across the table.

When the waiter appears with the check, you are to hand it back and say, "My companion will pay this bill." As the waiter raises an eyebrow, you reverse course: "O.K., I'll pay for my own lunch."

And at that point, the better angels of our nature perk up.