

America Needs More Robin Hoods

The middle of April is approaching fast; the time of the year when I hear a lot about taxes. Mention of taxes brings Robin Hood to my mind.

I don't think of him with the more recent spin that has been put on the legend, but in the original spirit of the tales.

Robin Hood is a model of an ethical outlaw. He broke bad laws by doing what was right for the right reasons.

His story has been misrepresented. In the original tellings he didn't "rob from the rich and give to the poor," but took back property that had been stolen through taxation and returned it to its rightful owners.

Generally, those who collected the taxes were richer than their victims, but regardless, taxing is still wrong.

In later stories, Robin Hood was sometimes changed from a regular guy into displaced royalty in order to tickle the fancy of a government-obsessed public unhappy with the current government. This cheapened the story, changing him from a truly good guy doing right because it was right into a hypocrite who wanted to get rid of one gang of rulers so his faction could take their place. In this interpretation, his outlawry was only a means to a political end. That's much less inspiring.

I prefer the more uplifting tale.

"Taxation" is a dishonest word for theft committed under color of law. The punishments for failure to pay taxes add another level of malevolence to the act of taxing. You can't do right by doing wrong. If something is good and necessary, convince people to finance it voluntarily. If they won't, you need to let it go. Good ideas don't have to be imposed by force.

Contrary to Oliver Wendell Holmes' claim, taxation is not the price we pay for a civilized society, any more than cancer is the price we pay for a healthy life. Instead, civilized society is what we sometimes manage to create in spite of uncivilized antisocial acts such as taxation. Of course, you'd expect someone whose power, position, and wealth came from taxation to mislead you about its nature.

Robin Hood is a hero, completely unlike those who live off of taxation. Americans need more Robin Hoods; heroic outlaws standing on their behalf against socially acceptable wrongs.

Perhaps a modern Robin Hood wouldn't stop at correcting taxation, but would also branch out to fight other authoritarian practices.