

Optimism of 2008 seems quaint 15 years later

The flip side also works: Time flies when things are bad. This week, the United States still is reeling from the upheaval in the House, still is feeling economic distress, still is dreading a rematch between two geezers lurching in opposite political directions, still is torn apart by racial tensions with ancient roots. This week also will mark 15 years since Barack Obama stood before a quarter of a million people in Chicago's Grant Park and said, "Yes, we can."

Time flies even for a country that once, eyes raised to a bright horizon, was suffused with a sense of optimism but that now, downcast, is consumed with division and despair.

Obama, to be sure, disappointed many: conservatives who hardened their views that he was a leftist reaching too far, liberals who thought he didn't go far enough. Today, not only is the 44th president demonized in some corners of the country, but so is his worthy Republican opponent, the late Sen. John McCain.

But there can be no debate that the Obama victory speech was a classic American expression of optimism and hope, the kind John F. Kennedy and Ronald Reagan might have admired — the sort that reflected the opening sentence of Kennedy's inaugural address, a line often passed over from his "Ask Not" speech with so many other memorable moments: "We observe today not a victory of party but a celebration of freedom — symbolizing an end as well as a beginning — signifying renewal as well as change."

As a result, Democrats and Republicans alike put Obama's victorious remarks in the American canon (along with his 2008 concession speech after the New Hampshire primary that was set to music by the Black Eyed Peas frontman will.i.am).

"It's a brilliant example of rhythmic language," said Mary Kate Cary, a former George H.W. Bush speechwriter who teaches a Great American Speeches course at the University of Virginia's Miller Center of Public Affairs. "Politicians want speeches to be memorable and transferable, to have people leave and talk about it to their friends so the word ripples out from there. Obama got that down to the syllable."

Let's pause amid our despair and look back to a different time in a different country:

If there is anyone out there who still doubts that America is a place where all things are possible, who still wonders if the dream of our founders is alive in our time, who still questions the power of our democracy, tonight is your answer.

It is inconceivable that a passage like this could be delivered today, when the question of the survival of American democracy is top of mind not only in the United States but abroad, where our allies shudder in fear and tremble in horror while watching the stress tests this country's democratic institutions face.

Young and old, rich and poor, Democrat and Republican, black, white, Latino, Asian, Native American, gay, straight, disabled and not disabled: Americans ... sent a message to the world that we have never been a collection of red states and blue states; we are, and will always be, the United States of America.

This is another passage that no American political figure could credibly utter today. Rebuilding that sense and breaking down the walls between red and blue — the 21st-century version of the Blue and Gray — is the new American Challenge.

[This is] the answer that led those who've been told for so long by so many to be cynical and fearful and doubtful about what we can achieve to put their hands on the arc of history and bend it once more toward the hope of a better day.

With a whispery allusion to the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. (bending the "arc of history"), Obama spoke about the cynicism, fears and doubts of that earlier age, when that triad seems almost quaint by today's standards.

The road ahead will be long. Our climb will be steep. We may not get there in one year or even in one term. But, America, I have never been more hopeful than I am tonight that we will get there. I promise you, we as a people will get there.

Here, to the trained ear or merely to those whose idealism was set afire by President Kennedy, is an allusion to his inaugural address, when the 35th president said of his goals, "All this will not be finished in the first one hundred days. Nor will it be finished in the first one thousand days, nor in the life of this administration, nor even perhaps in our lifetime on this planet. But let us begin." Four days after Kennedy's assassination, President Lyndon Johnson told a joint session of Congress, "Today, in this moment of new resolve, I would say to all my fellow Americans, let us continue."

In this country, we rise or fall as one nation, as one people. Let us resist the temptation to fall back on the same partisanship and pettiness and immaturity that has poisoned our politics for so long.

We hardly need note that partisanship, pettiness and immaturity have not perished from our politics, only that the will to dispose of them has.

Tonight we proved once more that the true strength of our nation comes not from the might of our arms or the scale of our wealth, but from the enduring power of our ideals: democracy, liberty, opportunity and unyielding hope.

These 40 words, and the sentiment that accompanies them, remain in the heart of Americans, regardless of their creed. Today we thirst for leadership with the credibility not only to say these words, but also to live them and work for them.

Where we are met with cynicism and doubt and those who tell us that we can't, we will respond with that timeless creed that sums up the spirit of a people: Yes, we can.

That phrase — yes, we can — is more than a campaign motto. It is an expression of the American character, of the country that saw tyranny in Europe and fought to end it, that saw the timeless orb of the moon in the sky and sought to reach it, that saw the threat of Soviet Communism and worked to defeat it. This speech is only 15 years old. The sentiment is 2 1/2 centuries old. Yes, we can. Yes, we should.

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MATTHEW PERRY 1969-2023

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Letters to the Editor

Legacy of Spencerville Covered Bridge continues

To the Editor:
On September 16, the Spencerville Covered Bridge commemorated its remarkable 150-year history. Constructed in 1873, this bridge is a cherished gem, holding immense significance for our past and future in DeKalb County. Its unwavering allure has captivated countless visitors, drawing in tens of thousands annually. One of only 90 covered bridges remaining in Indiana, it has seamlessly woven itself into the fabric of our county's tourism repertoire, charming all who venture across its threshold.

In 2018, a significant hurdle befell the bridge as it was forced to close following a failed inspection. However, through countless discussions, perseverance during a pandemic, and the collaborative efforts of many, the bridge triumphantly reopened on June 28, 2021. Embracing this new chapter, the Phase II project was launched, aiming to provide visitors with an elevated experience and a deeper connection to the bridge during their visits. At the recent sesquicentennial anniversary, two historical interpretation signs were unveiled, offering a glimpse into the mills that once dotted the landscape surrounding the bridge, as well as shedding light on the life and works of Arthur Franklin Mapes, a Kendallville native and esteemed poet who penned our state poem. As you stand upon the bridge today, you are invited to immerse yourself in the profound words of Arthur's early poem, "The Covered Bridge," inspired by his childhood visit with his brother. You will encounter the fascinating narratives of the mills and Arthur and be welcomed by the newly planted native plants on the eastern side. Although the initial planting took place last autumn, our flourishing native flora has swiftly transformed into a sanctuary for pollinators.

Beyond the addition of signage and blossoming plants, a nature trail is currently under development between the two bridges. We have partnered with the Garrett High School building trades program to offer this amenity. For the latest updates on this exciting project, please visit the Facebook page "The Spencerville Covered Bridge."

In this moment of reflection, I would like to express our deepest gratitude to all the individuals and businesses whose unwavering dedication brought the remarkable 150th Celebration to fruition and the successful realization of Phase II of the covered bridge projects. Your tireless efforts have ensured that the legacy of this cherished bridge continues to thrive and inspire generations to come.

County Commissioners: Bill Hartman, Mike Watson and Todd Sanderson, The Spencerville Covered Bridge Association, The Spencerville Volunteer Fire Department,

DeKalb County Visiting Bureau Board, The St. Joe — Spencerville Lions Club, Ben Parker & the DeKalb County Highway Department, Andrew Kruse, Garrett High School Building Trades, Service Steel Framing, Alliance Tax Services, LLC, Martha and Steve Ferguson & their granddaughter Madilyn, DeKalb County Soil & Water Conservation Board, The Arthur Franklin Mapes Family, Angela Mapes Turner, The Riverdale Class of 1958, The Indiana Covered Bridge Society, Sheriff Brady Thomas, Chief Deputy Ben Rice, Kenneth Warstler, Tom Warstler, Pat Hollman, Jerry Markle, Lavon Hart, Bob and Linda Wilder, George and Sandy Dykhuizen, Josh Berry, Mindy Emenhiser, Corey Renfrow, Kaylee Conn, Dennis and Shelly Getts, Ethan Watts, Kyle Strombeck, Don Diehl, Lee Yoder, Shane Starr, Erin Fritz, Killian Miller of 3:16 Removal and the many other volunteers who showed up for our clean-up day.

Mary Hollabaugh-Diehl
Auburn
DeKalb County Historian

American democracy is endangered by leftists

To the Editor:
The Biden administration and Democrat leadership claim American democracy is endangered by MAGA Republicans, the villains of the leftist narrative.

Does the Biden administration and Democrat leadership love freedom, and are Republicans the real danger to democracy?

I don't think so. The Democrat party is the real danger.

Totalitarians of the past, including Joseph Goebbels and Vladimir Lenin, used projection as a propaganda technique to divert attention and suspicion from themselves to their opponent, by accusing them of the intentions that they themselves harbor.

Additionally, they position themselves as the champions of democracy, the advocates of the people, and liberators.

Study some of the names of Marxist-Leninist governments and organizations, like People's Republic of China or Democratic People's Republic of Korea (North Korea).

These names reflect claims to represent democracy, the people and the promise of liberation.

A relatively small group of elitists foments societal chaos, dissatisfaction and distrust of the current government. Crises are manufactured to engender fear and a sense of victimhood.

This results in a violent revolution and overthrow of the government. The elitists form a new government promising deliverance but delivering totalitarianism.

Those who resist are sent to reeducation camps, work camps or the grave. The rest learn to keep silent under this tyranny of the minority.

Democrat leadership is displaying their hand in this regard now.

Hillary Clinton is known for her consuming hatred of conservatives, calling them "deplorables". Recently, she said conservatives need to undergo formal deprogramming.

The Biden administration continues to conspire to deprive us of our civil liberties under the Constitution and accompanying Bill of Rights.

I'd like to address a few critics, particularly the Steuben County woke enclave.

Several of my critics are current or former teachers and/or active with their local Democrat parties. It is not surprising such individuals dislike my criticism of the Biden administration, Democrat party leadership and public schools.

I am not usually distracted by spastic chihuahuas nipping at my heels.

Although Steuben County voters are predominantly conservative, I suspect Trine University and wealthy lake residents expatriated from Chicago exert a woke influence. Residents of the coasts (East and West), cities, and college towns are susceptible to this ideology.

Concerning Victoria Woods, she needs to address my arguments. Her online ad-hominem attack about a perceived lack of education is not a rebuttal.

Regarding her suggestion to get out and touch the grass, this sounds like language from a Timothy Leary psychedelic experience. Steuben County borders cannabis-selling Michigan, after all.

A few conservative public-school teachers are offended by my criticisms of public education.

I do not believe most public-school teachers are aligned with the wokeness and gender ideology indoctrination programs. I estimate the percentage of woke teachers, largely teacher union members, at 30% or less. The remainder are effectively silenced by the tyranny of the minority.

How do I know this? I have trusted friends who are current or former teachers.

Finally, I would like to comment upon an article on September 23 by editor-in-chief Mike Marturello, titled "Show Some Respect, People". In this article, Mike suggests conservatives at ENSC school board meetings represent a threat of violence.

I met three of these individuals for breakfast recently. After meeting them in person, I consider this insinuation ridiculous.

His article reminds me of the National School Boards Association (NSBA) letter to Joe Biden labeling parents as potential domestic terrorists. This letter resulted in persecution by federal agencies until their actions were exposed through whistleblowers to Republican legislators.

Mike's article sounds like an attempt at intimidation. Violating Robert's Rules of Order, however rude, is not a predictor of domestic terrorism.

Robert Sparkman
Rome City