



The Bunkhouse Chronicle

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Columnist

The Glory of Damascus

The new American penchant for tribalism isn't doing us any favors.

That was on full display at the most recent Democrat presidential debates, where candidates pandered vigorously to their various tribes by promising virtually anything they could think of — from healthcare to college educations — for free. The idea that Bernie Sanders, who is still combing his hair with a balloon, and whose pandering is delivered in language taken directly from the All Soviet Congress of 1917, is even on the dais as a candidate should probably cause every thinking American to cringe.

But mostly we don't. Many millions actually celebrate Sanders' breathless promises to the groaning proletariat, despite the historical evidence which clearly predicts the result of his favorite policies: inveterate poverty for all but a very

select few — an elite cadre of policy wonks whose work in government insulates them from the worst results of their own policies, while simultaneously enriching them.

Naturally, Sanders, who is a multi-millionaire, won't apologize for his own considerable wealth, but vigorously insists that others should, and has a plan to both take their money and humiliate them for having it in the first place. This theme, and its many subtle variations, seems to dominate the policy thinking of the Democrat candidates for president.

The tilt toward tribalism is driven, at least in part, by hyper-partisan television punditry and the resulting phenomenon of universally bad candidates for high office. It's also linked to the identity craze, which is that weird insistence on the narrowest claims of one's personal identity over debate and compromise. It's a mindset that ultimately serves only to disrupt our ability to negotiate reasonable solutions because that identity claim is sacrosanct, and the result is a populace and a government in perpetual partisan gridlock.

Most ironically, falling hard into this identity trap earns one the title of being "woke," which is bandied about with suspiciously religious fervor, particularly on college campuses where Western civilization

is routinely derided and the promise of America is no longer measured by its many successes, but rather by its flaws — both real and imagined.

Many of the candidates at the debate weren't content to offer Americans, who should know better, lots of free stuff. Many of them think it is a good idea to offer free stuff to all of Latin America too, providing an irresistible enticement for many millions — living in the abject poverty of their own countries — to pack up their kids and make the long walk north where, they are promised, they will get free everything.

But all of that free stuff has to be paid for by someone, which many millions of American voters seem to forget in their zeal to see student loan debts forgiven, universal healthcare, or any number of the other "free" ideas floating around in politics. The irony here, of course, is that they will offer these cheesecakes for free, no matter what they actually cost.

Afghanistan is a good place to look when investigating the end result of the tribal mind. It is among the poorest nations on earth and, after 18 years of pouring our blood and treasure into the rock pile, America will soon be pulling out, having accomplished nothing. The Taliban who were in charge

when we invaded will be back in charge, throwing acid on little girls learning to read, executing women for exposing their ankles, destroying world heritage sites with howitzers, and the long slide back to the 7th century will begin anew for its perpetually hapless citizens.

And for an exclamation point, which they hardly need, the Taliban continue launching car bomb attacks in Kabul, killing dozens at a time, even as we negotiate our way out of the country, bloodied and degraded by the experience.

But at least they will still have their tribes.

The recent debates, and I'm certain it will be true of all them to follow, reminded me of a memorable scene from the movie masterpiece "Lawrence of Arabia." T.E. Lawrence, of course, had done a considerable job of uniting the various Arab tribes to make the march on Damascus, where they might finally create an Arab entity out of the remnants of European occupation and colonization at the end of World War I.

Having gathered the many tribes to begin their negotiations, Lawrence was faced with bedlam — chieftains arguing with chieftains, angry camel herders storming across tables to yell at each other, heaping insult upon insult, even

doormen reaching for their swords, all in an effort to insist on the natural rights of their own tribe.

They were so busy demanding the rights of their tribes, defending their notions of honor and identity, that they were unable to turn on the power, draw water from wells, keep the telephones running, or fight a fire threatening the city. "The Tawhid do not carry water!" one Chieftain yells above the din.

After watching the debates, it seems plausible that our nation is headed in a similar direction. Having kicked the notion of *E Pluribus Unum* to the curb, our many tribes now want all of the glory of Damascus, but without having to carry any water. And in our unabashedly consumerist, poorly educated, and increasingly tribal culture, the temptation to believe that we really can get something for nothing may ultimately prove too much to resist.



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