

K PUBLIC SQUARE

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Happy Father's Day



By LYNDON ZAITZ

Everyone has a father. We all think we have the best dad in the world and we're all right.

You have to admit mothers have better publicity, but dads are every bit as important as dear mom. A mom can teach her child how to throw a ball or use a hammer but generally we look to dad to learn those skills.

My dad, Clarence, is father to four boys and one girl. Regardless of old we get, your dad will always be your dad. The Zaitz children are lucky to have Clarence as our father. For one, he has always been there. Each of us has been shaped by the teachings of Daddy Zaitz. We can all swing a hammer, plant a garden and most importantly, have a fine-tuned sense of curiosity.

My dad spent his career in the world of journalism—as a reporter and as owner of several publications, including the *Keizer Times*, the forerunner to the *Keizertimes*. That curiosity has done well for his children

We all ask questions. Lots of questions. We want to know things: how, when, why and where.

The 'where' part has given us experiences many of our peers didn't have. Dad always wants to know where 'that' road leads to, or what's around the bend.

When dad learned of Oregon's gold history, he didn't waste a minute. Soon our family of seven was spending most summer weekends along Quartsville Creek in Linn County, cracking open the creek bed and panning for gold. While we never found the large nuggets he dreamed of, we had the best times on the creek swimming and camping.

Without his career we never would have taken six-week road trips around the country, poking into remotes parts of America. We all inherited his travel bug.

Dad celebrated his 91st birthday this week and is as spry as ever, traveling as always, seeking new places to see—which is nigh impossible since he and mom have traveled to every corner of the country, many times.

We all have fathers. They are all the best in the world. Some are better. Like my dad, Clarence.

(Lyndon Zaitz is publisher of the *Keizertimes*.)

Wokeness vs. authoritarianism

By MICHAEL GERSON

America is in a contest of contending nightmares.

The dreams of conservatives are currently troubled by "wokeness" and critical race theory. As with most nightmares, there is a grain of truth within such terrors.

For most people, wokeness involves being mindful of the cruel and oppressive portions of American history, being alert to persistent structural racism and being determined to right past and present wrongs. This is the theory that attracted many people to street protests last summer. By this standard, count me as woke.

But there is an academic version of critical race theory that goes a great deal further. In this variety of postmodernism, all power structures are rotted to the core by white supremacy. The ideals of democracy—pluralism, freedom, the rule of law, even reasoned debate itself—are myths or narratives serving the privileged. In this view, politics is no longer a contest of ideas. It is a fight for power, a zero-sum struggle between oppressor and oppressed. This type of wokeness involves seeing through the pretensions of a free society and favoring the oppressed in every instance.

The distinctions here are not minor. There is a difference between using critical race theory as a tool to understand unjust power structures and believing that every outworking of Western democratic theory is inherently unjust. There is a difference between examining the disturbing truths of American history and denying the existence of objective truth and the possibility of persuasion.

In contrast, the nightmares of progressives are currently dominated by the growth of right-wing authoritarianism and fascism. In these fears, there is more than a grain of truth.

Large elements of the American populist right mythologize the nation's past rather than face its failures. They dismiss real news as fake and embrace obvious propaganda. They are anti-intellectual to the point of denying lifesaving scientific truths. They fear diversity and target racial, ethnic and religious minorities for resentment. They cultivate a sense of victimhood by warning of arrogant elites and vast conspiracies. These are not isolated ailments; they are the textbook symptoms of a fascist political infection.



Some on the left want to use these trends to discredit the entirety of modern conservatism. They contend that authoritarianism and fascism are the logical, necessary outgrowth of the political approach that emerged with the presidential nomination of Barry Goldwater. In this view, Goldwater is Richard M. Nixon, who is Ronald Reagan, who is Jack Kemp, who is George W. Bush, who is John McCain, who is Mitt Romney, who is Donald Trump. This a raving, slanderous absurdity. The existence of a principled, tolerant, constructive party of the right in American politics is not only a possibility; it is a crying need.

In comparing the right's fear of extreme critical race theory and the left's fear of fascism, it is not really useful to ask which horror would be worse if implemented. Both ideologies are ultimately at war with liberal democracy—the pursuit of a common good, the practice of incremental reform, the cultivation of social trust and the acceptance of democratic outcomes.

But it is crucial to ask which nightmare is currently most likely to be implemented. And here there is no question.

Extreme wokeness—the enforcement of ideological sameness through intimidation, the illiberal silencing of competing voices, the canceling of human beings for relatively minor infractions, the forced, ritual renunciations of previous views—is a problem on some college campuses, in some newsrooms and within some corporate cultures. And I don't want to minimize such excesses.

But seriously now. Only one of these nightmares has taken over a major political party, which is in the process of purging all dissent. Only one of these delusions is the governing vision of a former president who just might be president again. Only one of these developments has turned the backbones of the minority leader of the House, the minority leader of the Senate and almost every other Republican leader into gelatinous goo. Only one of these ideologies produced a crowd that sacked the U.S. Capitol and threatened violence against political leaders. Only one of these movements is working in state legislatures across the country to make electoral systems more vulnerable to manipulation and mob rule.

It is important to confront every source of illiberalism in American life. Social justice leaders such as Frederick Douglass, Abraham Lincoln, the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. and John Lewis shared a common belief. They saw solutions to America's worst sins in the more radical application of America's highest ideals, not in their abandonment.

But this does not mean that all such challenges to democracy are equal. Right-wing authoritarianism is the force that could undo the American system. In a contest of nightmares, it is not even a contest.

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