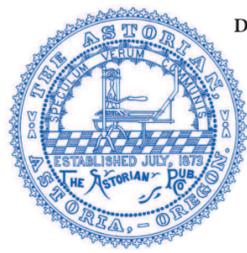


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OUR VIEW

We must reject toxic lies of racism

It was difficult to dispassionately follow the news last weekend, as groups of neo-Nazis and counter-protesters clashed in Charlottesville, Virginia. One woman was murdered. Two police officers died in a terrible accident.

That much anger, hate and violence is hard to stomach, and it surely left Americans across the country seething as Nazi and Confederate sympathizers marched angrily through our public space.

In the wake of the violence, about 100 people locally turned out Sunday night at a vigil organized by Indivisible North Coast Oregon, sang protest songs and observed a moment of silence for the fallen.

In Charlottesville, dozens of major issues were at play, but there's one fact that can hopefully find universal agreement: You can either be an American, or you can be a Nazi — you can't be both. You cannot call for the overthrow of America's core principles and still call yourself a patriot.

Photos of protesters waving American, Confederate and Nazi flags are incongruent. Those governments — their principles and their history — are opposites, enemies. They opposed each other, they warred against each other.

Removing flags from public spaces and tearing down statues doesn't "erase history." It just doesn't hold that history in high regard and encourage its celebration.

Germany long ago unceremoniously destroyed Nazi-era monuments. That history certainly hasn't been erased — most people are crystal clear on what the swastika stood for. And what it stood for is disturbingly undergoing a resurgence here in America.

There is no reason a patriotic American would tolerate or promote Nazi ideals. It's the flag of a government that declared war on the United States, that killed hundreds of thousands of our brave soldiers and millions of other people. A government that waged world war.

We have freedom of speech in this country, but allowance should never be confused with acceptance.

As U.S. Sen. Orrin Hatch, R-Utah, said Saturday, "My brother didn't give his life fighting Hitler for Nazi ideas to go unchallenged here at home." Every one of us should proudly endorse this view.

We must stand up for that most American (and Jeffersonian) of beliefs: We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. Wherever they arise, we must always reject the toxic lies of racism and the anti-American ideas and speech that were on display in Charlottesville.

Astoria taking right steps with police department

The city of Astoria is taking exactly the right strategic steps to fix the beleaguered police department after the sudden retirement of Police Chief Brad Johnston.

Johnston's Aug. 2 retirement came after the findings of a Portland labor attorney's independent assessment of the department ordered by City Manager Brett Estes. The assessment found the department was at the "point of a crisis" and fraught with leadership failures and staffing shortages that created unsustainable overtime and deep morale problems.

The assessment also found Johnston exercised "extraordinarily poor judgment" that resulted in a violation of city travel and ethics policies. Estes said Johnston was aware of the findings prior to his retirement, and that his decision to leave was "made in his own volition."

Instead of simply hiring a new chief, the city, through Estes, is taking laudable steps that should provide both immediate leadership and time to strategically address other issues the inquiry raised.

The city's first move was to tap the Oregon Association Chiefs of Police interim leadership assistance program and hire Geoff Spalding, who retired as chief of the Beaverton Police Department in 2016 and had 31 years of experience with the Fullerton Police Department in California, to lead the department on an interim basis until a permanent hire is made. Estes said the hiring process could take up to six months. Meanwhile, the well-qualified Spalding will begin work Aug. 28.

The city is already addressing staffing issues in Astoria 911 Dispatch, which Johnston also supervised. City councilors approved the hiring of an operations supervisor for the center, which it did not have before.

Once Spalding begins, he will have time to address other staffing issues and rebuild relationships and confidence among the officers. He'll also be able to work with staff in identifying the qualities they desire in a new chief, which Estes can then use in the hiring process.

While it's not an immediate fix, it's the smart fix for the department, one that should provide long-term benefits.



Our house divided

By ROSS DOUTHAT

New York Times News Service

Summertime, sweltering and stressful, makes our cold civil war feel hot. The madness and violence of last year crested in the summer, with the shootings of cops in Dallas and Baton Rouge. Now the dog days are here again, and

with them a new spasm — white supremacists with tiki torches, antifa and the alt-right going at it, a white nationalist running down protesters, a little Weimar re-enactment in the streets of Charlottesville, Virginia.

So while the president blathers about how some of the torchbearers were fine people, other people are talking about whether we could have a civil war for real. In *The New Yorker*, Robin Wright quotes a State Department expert on internecine conflict whose personal estimate is that "the United States faces a 60 percent chance of civil war over the next 10 to 15 years." Lest you doubt his science, he was part of an informal poll by the military journalist and historian Tom Ricks earlier this year, which produced the lower but still notable consensus estimate that we have a 35 percent chance of falling into civil war.

What do these bets mean? Their language evokes our own 1860s, 1930s Spain or contemporary Syria. But Ricks says he means something narrower — a period more like the late 1960s and early 1970s, with serious and sustained political violence and widespread resistance to political authority, but without Chancellorsvilles or Guernicas.

That seems more plausible than what people usually mean by civil war. But we are still not close to even that level of breakdown, nowhere close to the social chaos and revolutionary fervor that gave us 2,500 bombings in 18 months during Richard Nixon's first term. The chaos during Trump's ascent and presidency has been extreme by the standards of recent politics but not by the standards of America's worst periods of crisis.

So why the civil-war anxieties? In part, because our media environment breeds hysteria; in part, because Trump himself does so.

But the underlying reason people are worried is a plausible one: America's divisions are genuinely serious, our cold civil war entirely real.

Our divisions are partisan: The parties are more ideologically polarized than at any point in the 20th century, and party loyalty increasingly shapes not just votes but social identity, friendship, where you live and whom you hope your children marry.

Our divisions are religious: The decline of institutional Christianity means that we have no religious center apart from Oprah and Joel Osteen, the metaphysical gap between the secularist wing of liberalism and religious traditionalists is far wider than the intra-Christian divisions of the past, and on the fringes you can see hints of a fully post-Christian and post-liberal right and left.

Our divisions are racial and ethnic and class-based and generational, conspicuously so in the Trump era. And they are geographic: The metropolis versus the hinterland, the coasts against the middle of the country. It would not be hard to sketch lines on a map partitioning the USA into two or three



Denise Sanders/The Baltimore Sun

Workers remove the Robert E. Lee and Thomas J. "Stonewall" Jackson monument in Wyman Park early Wednesday in Baltimore.

or four more homogeneous and perhaps more functional republics. And if you imagined some catastrophe suddenly dissolving our political order and requiring us to start anew, it is not at all clear that we would be able to forge a reunited republic, a second continental nation.

Moreover, our divisions induce a particular anxiety because each of our two main factions reigns supreme in one particular arena. Conservatism is (somehow) politically dominant, with control of the legislative and executive branches and a remarkable power in the states. Meanwhile liberalism dominates the cultural commanding heights as never before, with not only academia and the media but also late-night television and sportswriting and even young-adult fiction more monolithically and — to conservatives — oppressively progressive.

A house divided against itself can sometimes stand for quite a while — so long as most people prefer its roof to the rain and wind.

So both sides have reasons to feel threatened, disempowered and surrounded; both can feel as though they exist under a kind of enemy rule.

Thus described, it may sound remarkable that we haven't plunged into domestic chaos and civil strife already. But not every American is a partisan, there is still more to life than politics for most of us, and under the right circumstances people with deep differences can live together in peace for a great while — so long as events do not force a crisis, so long as the great political or social questions don't feel so existential and zero-sum that they cannot be managed or endured.

Slavery was such an existential issue — but its closest analogue today, abortion, does not lie so close to the center of our politics. Race, immigration and religious liberty are all volatile, but the specific controversies are more incremental than existential: Voter-ID laws are not Jim Crow, and toppling Confederate statues isn't Reconstruction; refugee restrictions aren't internment camps; fights over the rights of Christian

businesses and colleges are not a persecution.

An economic crisis can spur a crackup. But our wealth and the welfare state both cushion us substantially, as we saw after the Great Recession. Wars can lead to dissolution: Opposition to the War of 1812 brought New England to the brink of secession, opposition to Vietnam helped give us our last era of calamity, and of course defeat in World War I broke up the multiethnic empires that the United States increasingly resembles. But our wars are so professionalized and technologized that even unpopular ones can be sustained a long time without pushing domestic politics to a breaking point.

This leaves the most likely near-term threat to our fractured republic as either something external to the system — a worst-case pandemic or terrorist attack, a climate-change-induced catastrophe — or else a threat concentrated at the top, in the imperial presidency around which our democratic derangements increasingly revolve.

If you asked me to script a path from where we are today to a period of violent division or disunion, I would invent a character with some of the qualities of a Trump and some of an Emmanuel Macron — a charismatic leader who appeals not just to the extremes but to some populist or technocratic center, and who promises an escape from polarization and division and from the gridlock that those divisions have induced.

Then I would have this character retain his mystique more successfully than usual for recent presidents, and use it to pursue an agenda at once extraconstitutional and fairly popular, so that institutions would either struggle to contain him or simply surrender in a way they won't for our current chief executive. Then add the right crisis, or the right cascade of them, and imagine one side or the other in our current cold civil war seeking actual "Second Amendment remedies" or forming a for-real Resistance against presidential tyranny — and suddenly you could have the kind of strife that the experts cited by Wright and Ricks seem to be envisioning.

But watching Trump stagger and Macron's poll numbers sink, I would still judge my imagined scenario remote.

Things are getting worse in many ways, and the rest of the Trump era does not promise much in the way of healing and reconciliation. But despite what scripture tells us, in politics a house divided against itself can sometimes stand for quite a while — so long as most people prefer its roof to the rain and wind, and relatively few have a clear and pressing incentive to start knocking down the walls.