

OPINION

editor@dailyastorian.com



THE DAILY ASTORIAN

Founded in 1873

KARI BORGEN
Publisher

JIM VAN NOSTRAND
Editor

JEREMY FELDMAN
Circulation Manager

DEBRA BLOOM
Business Manager

JOHN D. BRUIJN
Production Manager

CARL EARL
Systems Manager

PRO-CON

ARE AMERICANS MORE DIVIDED NOW THAN IN THE PAST?



AP Photo/Charles Tasnadi

Smoke rises from burning buildings in downtown Washington, D.C., on April 5, 1968 in the wake of looting and burning after the April 4 assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Troops were ordered into the downtown area.



AP Photo/Dozier Mobley

A building burns in Washington, D.C. on April 5, 1968.



AP Photo/Bob Schutz

A pedestrian is waved away by a National Guard soldier wearing a gas mask near 7th and K streets in Washington, D.C. on April 6, 1968. The bayonets on the rifles are sheathed.

PRO: Unprecedented division is conquering our national politics

WASHINGTON — The United States political landscape is more divided than it has been since the Vietnam and civil rights era some 50 years ago and in many ways is even more polarized.

The style and content of Donald Trump's presidency is a major factor in this division and our country is suffering as a result.

Division is nothing new in politics or in personal life. Since the formative years of our nation, differences existed and infiltrated our earliest political debates.

Each one of us is divided in simple or perhaps complex ways in our most basic life functions too. At school, at work, in our neighborhoods we take sides and defend our positions. We divide ourselves into tribes in many aspects of our lives.

There are those in private and public life who seek to gain power and profit, though, from our natural inclination to tribalism. We must understand this and should tread carefully, but most of us do not.

Citizen, candidate, and now President Trump has spent a life adhering to the "divide and conquer" philosophy in his business and now in his politics.

By breaking up and dividing folks to consolidate his power and scatter the power of his adversaries, President Trump is playing a dangerous game with our democratic society.

The lists of Trump tactics and topics on this strategy are long. Race, economic status, gender, political party, social issues and so on have all been on his menu and often in ugly ways.

The division spills out into our voting, our social media feeds, and perhaps most notably into how Congress is conducting the people's business.

As I write this, immigrant families continue to be divided, U.S. senators are bickering over Supreme Court nomination proceedings, elections are being conducted, and it's all done under the shadow of the divisions that Trump seeks to exploit.

The marches, protests and riots of Vietnam and civil rights era have given way to marches

and protests now.

The deep division, partisanship and distrust of the Nixon and Watergate era echoes eerily in the questions about Trump and his campaign's potential involvement with a hostile Russian government.

As a result we now live in a nation where each and every morsel of information is filtered through the lens of our divisions.

Anything that contradicts the established view of our tribe is immediately cast aside or even labeled "fake" to feed our tribalism and division.

Along the way, Trump tweets away, fueling this division. He creates confusion while speaking to his tribe while stirring anger from those tribes organized against him, furthering the divide.

And we largely play our role as the faithfully divided. Democrats and liberals recoil at every turn. Republicans and conservatives cheer or, in the most repulsive moments, remain silent in approval.

The division even exists within tribes. Conservatives are split between the Trump loyalists and those who, even in their frequent silence, find Trump's tactics distasteful.

Progressives are divided between the more moderate and more liberal wings. These subdivisions are making it even more difficult to rally against those seeking to divide us.

Open and honest debate of the differences great and small can actually be an empowering process. At different points in our history we have come out of periods of deep division stronger, while in others we have come out weaker from the fight.

Time will tell how we as a nation move forward from our current division. What do we do to break the trend and refuse to be conquered?

Only when we begin to listen, question, seek understanding and break down the walls of prejudice that are impeding us will we take the first steps in a more positive direction.

Don Kusler is national director of Americans for Democratic Action (ADA), a progressive advocacy organization.



DON KUSLER

CON: US had much deeper divisions in the early 1970s

NEW YORK — Today, our country is divided along a number of different fault lines — the primary one being for or against President Donald Trump. And many of the policies of the Trump administration are equally contentious.

But our country had much deeper divisions from 1968 to 1974, when it seemed the country was at war with itself. Yet the "radical movements" of the Woodstock generation shaped where we are today.

The era of race relations exploded in open civil rebellion after the murder of Dr. Martin Luther King. Soldiers patrolled the streets of Detroit, Newark and other American cities to restore order.

The war in Vietnam was deeply unpopular and millions of people protested in anti-war marches. When President Richard Nixon ordered the invasion of Cambodia in 1970, the nation exploded in protests.

Armed National Guard troops killed and wounded unarmed student protesters at Kent State and Jackson State universities. Students across the nation went on strike, closing the university system and many secondary schools.

On the cultural side, the country was divided between the generations. While the anti-war anger helped propel the movement, issues such as marijuana, long hair, women's lib and social justice were vehemently argued from both sides.

Radical movements — today's domestic terrorists — such as the Weather Underground took on the government with violence and bombings. New ideas about the environment, a wom-

an's place in society and social justice for minorities were decried as undermining democracy.

The hippies preached "Give peace a chance" and "All you need is love." The "establishment" responded with "America, love it or leave it." There was not a great deal of middle ground, and many a family gathering descended into acrimony. The talk among the young was not about "resistance" — it was about "revolution."

And of course, there was the president — Richard Nixon — who fed the flames of division for his own political gain.

"Tricky Dick" harnessed the power of the government — the FBI, the justice and police departments — to create enemy lists and conduct illegal break-ins, surveillance and harassment. It was all done in the name of "law and order."

And in 1972, Nixon won a landslide election, guaranteeing four more years of upheaval. But the country did not come apart. Watergate happened and our government's checks and balances worked.

If you look back at the radical ideas of the late 1960s that divided our nation, many of them have become mainstream today. The country moved on.

Our country may be divided right now, but what we can learn from this particular history lesson is that there is hope for the future.

Peter Rush is the author of "Wild Word," a newly released novel set against the backdrop of America's protest era in the early 1970s, and CEO of Kellen, a nonprofit organization management firm.



PETER RUSH

If you look back at the radical ideas of the late 1960s that divided our nation, many of them have become mainstream today. The country moved on.