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OUR VIEW

Another day on planet Earth

Our differences are well documented. Lines drawn along political, philosophical, ethnic and religious divides give the impression that we’re all on different teams. Those sides lead to everything from small squabbles to horrific rifts. They’re the defining narratives we use to understand and explain our lives. But there’s a big, unifying similarity we all share, and that’s the place we call home. The planet Earth, the beautiful and strange and wondrous cosmic address that has been the setting for every moment of recorded human history, save the few short jaunts into our tiny solar system neighborhood in the unfathomable universe.

Our planet is remarkably unique among the cosmos, a fact we’ve only come to understand in the past century. As inhospitable as places like Death Valley and Antarctica are to our delicate human bodies, even they pale to the brutal environs found literally everywhere else outside our atmosphere. It’s no wonder many have



Contributed by NASA
The western hemisphere, as shown in the Blue Marble photographs released by NASA in 2002. The collection was the most detailed color depiction of planet Earth ever compiled.

taken to calling her Mother Earth. Environmentalism isn’t a new concept. For centuries of human history we had a close bond with the planet. Our agrarian ancestors knew that careful stewardship was the only way to ensure it would continue to yield us crops, and the hunters and gatherers knew that only biological balance between flora, fauna and

was at a breaking point. Oil slicks on the Cuyahoga River in industrialized Ohio had caught fire several times. The bald eagle was on the brink of extinction in the West and whale populations in the world’s oceans were critically low. An oil spill off the coast of Santa Barbara that devastated the pristine beaches was a stark reminder of the true impact of energy production on the environment. Closer to home, the misuse of the Willamette River was turning it into a toxic discharge, and reckless irrigation practices on the east side of the state were draining streams and rivers to the point of ecological collapse. The first Earth Day was celebrated on April 22, 1970, as a way to reengage with our planet. It was a day for education and celebration, to learn about our home and understand the role we play on it. Later in the same year, President Richard Nixon created the Environmental Protection Agency and signed a robust update to the Clean Air Act. Both were met with bipartisan support. It’s a shame that environmentalism has become a political wedge issue, con-

sidering it should be a place we can find substantial middle ground. The environmental movement of the 1960s has bred a knee jerk anti-development culture, while President Trump’s administration has targeted federal climate change research, ostensibly for short-term economic gains. Both narrow views of the Earth are unbefitting her grandeur. Most of us are left in the middle. We certainly care for our planet and earnestly want to see it thrive for our children and grandchildren. But we also know that means finding our place in it. This Earth Day, and the week that follows, we want to reengage with our corner of the planet. It means spending time outside, away from the divisive tendencies of our devices, and learning about the billions of tiny parts that make up the whole wide world. It means planting a garden or going for a hike, cleaning up litter at a park or teaching your children about energy conservation. It means treating the planet as a shared resource and not another line to divide us.

OTHER VIEWS

Conservatives should be thanking Mueller

For the better part of two years, President Donald Trump and his partisans did everything they could to denigrate and discredit Robert Mueller and his investigation. They’re not done yet. “Statements are made about me by certain people in the Crazy Mueller Report, in itself written by 18 Angry Democrat Trump Haters, which are fabricated & totally untrue,” the president tweeted Friday morning. He went on to denounce the “Report” for containing statements that “are total bullshit & only given to make the other person look good (or me to look bad).” So the Mueller report is now, in the official White House version, “total exoneration,” except when it’s “total bullshit.” Got that? In June 2017, *The Wall Street Journal* editorial board, long a skeptic of Mueller’s probe, offered the central argument for why an investigation was necessary. “Russian meddling in U.S. elections is a serious matter and Americans need to know what happened,” they wrote. “If Mr. Trump or key associates canoodled with the Russians to steal an election, then he must face the likely consequence of impeachment.” That’s exactly right. And it’s why an investigation by a partisan-controlled House or Senate committee would never have sufficed. Would, say, the “Nunes Report” have convinced anyone who wasn’t already planning to vote for Trump that no collusion had taken place? Would a decision by the president to fire Mueller in 2017 — as he very nearly did —



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have allayed suspicions, much less put the matter behind us? Only Mueller, with his reputation for probity and credibility among Democrats, could have prevented the collusion narrative from achieving the status of unshakable faith among millions of Americans, akin to the false “Bush lied, people died” narrative that still dogs the 43rd president. That required the no-stone-left-turned approach manifest in the long investigation and 448-page report. Anything else would have been dismissed as a whitewash. So why aren’t conservatives grateful? From the beginning of the investigation, conservatives have been invested in a counter-narrative that is as flawed as the collusion narrative itself. This has various elements, from Trump’s repeated attempts to cast doubt on Russian interference, to the equally spurious idea that there can be no obstruction of justice without an underlying crime — a point that ought to be obvious to anyone who supported impeaching Bill Clinton for lying under oath about a noncriminal act. Most absurd: The claim, repeated Thursday by Attorney General William Barr, that the White House fully cooperated with the investigation. For more on that, read the part of the report where then-White House counsel Don McGahn opted to quit instead of participating in the firing of Mueller. “He called his lawyer, drove to the White House, packed up his office, prepared to submit a resignation letter with his chief



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of staff, told [Reince] Priebus that the President had asked him to ‘do crazy shit,’ and informed Priebus and [Steve] Bannon that he was leaving.” Here’s what conservatives have largely failed to acknowledge: Trump’s absolution by Mueller didn’t come about because his intentions were innocent but because his aims were thwarted or his methods were incompetent. If his own staff hadn’t blocked him from firing Mueller, he would have done so. If Don Jr. had been delivered a crate full of stolen Clinton documents at that Trump Tower meeting with a shady Russian lawyer, he would have taken it. If *The New York Times* hadn’t exposed Paul Manafort for taking illicit cash from Ukraine’s president, he might well have wound

up as a senior U.S. official vulnerable to Russian blackmail. If the Senate hadn’t blocked Trump from easing sanctions on Russia, or public opinion hadn’t revolted over his performance at Helsinki, he would have cozied up to Vladimir Putin. Trump is the guy who keeps getting saved from walking into oncoming traffic, only to complain that someone yanked his collar. This makes Mueller the latest in a long list of figures whose scrupulousness saved Trump from the consequences of his unscrupulousness. For this, the special counsel will get no thanks from the president, much less an apology from all the two-bit talking heads who spent the past 23 months questioning his motives and impugning his integrity.

The good news in all this is that the rule of law and reason still functions in the Age of Trump — despite Trump. Responsible officials checked a dangerous president. Political pressure allowed Mueller to finish his report and ensured its release. Americans got a comprehensive presentation and analysis of the facts, which may have exonerated the president legally but which clearly indict him morally. Ultimately the matter will be settled at the polls in November 2020. The system, as they say, worked. Conservatives who claim to believe in that system should be grateful they didn’t get their wish when they sought to tear it down.

Bret Stephens is a columnist for *The New York Times*.