

i remember when

POLITICS

Ain't Pretty

Photography by **Robert King**

I was so relieved when the political season was finally over and I was able to get back to watching sports without interruptions.

However, this recent election cycle raised some very serious concerns as I was thinking about the collective good or the absence of any thinking at all.

One of the disturbing issues that was underscored during this debacle is how limited our choices are with our two-party system. Although not news, it did remind me of our system's limitations. One candidate was an insider with big problems and the other candidate was an outsider with bigger problems. What we are left with is a very fragmented picture compared to seventy years ago, when the Democrats and Republicans might've had some differences but both seemed to be looking after the well-being of the country rather than the well-being of themselves.

One possible explanation for this unusual conflict is that people can only unify when they have a real or collectively imagined enemy. The United States is an empire unparalleled since Ancient Rome and commands such respect that enemies of any stature are not currently major threats. ISIS and North Korea are enemies, but they are not sizeable enough threats to keep you awake at nights. Certainly they are not a big enough threat to our freedom to unify us. We don't seem to have any enemies except, apparently, ourselves.

While it's been great fun watching the chaos of our political system, it is the only system we have. We should perhaps be more careful with it so it doesn't implode on us.

If you believe in democracy, then the Constitution and the Bill of Rights are your bible. They differ from the Christian Bible in that they are always evolving to suit the needs and demands of contemporary society. Religion and politics both demand faith.

Politics by the people and for the people has to respect the needs of the community, to value the equality of individuals before the law, and to serve and protect its citizens. Politicians usually present an idealized version of themselves and our values with a little



Puritan morality tossed into touch a nerve of hypocritical reflection. The television westerns of the '50s, with the good sheriff in a white hat who defeated the forces of evil (usually in a black hat) were reflections of an ideal world, not the real world. Good, the collective good, wins in the end. This fantasy is also the glue that holds our society together. Our young democracy is constantly in the process of evolution. At times appearing to be more inclusive and at other times less so, this nation is still evolving to fulfill the optimistic theories of our founding fathers. In this election, my sympathies went out to the citizens who felt they had to follow their candidates unwillingly, just because of their political affiliation or perhaps a single issue.

Thomas Jefferson, Alexander Hamilton, John Adams and Ben Franklin all were responding to the thinkers of the enlightenment. Voltaire, Rousseau and Descartes maintained that neither man nor society were perfect, but that we should work towards the perfection of both. This is what the experiment in American democracy has been. Practicing democracy to make it better is a simple approach that has served the country well, with some exceptions, over the last 240 years. There have been some missteps and there continue to be swerves to the right and the left, but eventually we find a balance between the two in this experiment we call democracy. Like a lawyer or doctor who practices their profession, we are practitioners of democracy. Some politicians make light of idealism; some think they're smarter than others and some think only of themselves. These are not the ideals that will contribute to our society's efforts to fulfill its potential. There's nothing wrong with idealism; it provides us with a goal toward which to aspire. Like the Promised Land, we look forward to the day when all are treated equally and everyone has an opportunity to explore and participate fully in the process of realizing their individual potential.

I hope our newly elected officials keep all of this in mind as they steer this tugboat that is pushing five barges down the Mississippi River at night in a rain storm trying to avoid the sandbars, dodging trees and other traffic coming from the opposite direction.

Reported by Bayshore Bob, a Hyde Park resident



Bayshore Bob