

“Who would foolishly want to live in yesteryear America?”

The Danville News

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Thursday, July 1, 2021

“One Nation Under God”

Word Count: 750

In 1954 our pledge of allegiance added the phrase borrowed from Lincoln who borrowed it from the Bible: ‘under God.’ It’s easy to say it. Do we demonstrate what it means? Sunday, we take our turn to sign the Declaration of Independence. What will you do to fulfill this sacred trust? One nation under God. The mistaken and naive use this phrase as a boast when it’s admonition. If we stand under God, we’re held accountable to achieve what Divine Universal Truth stands for.

Fareed Zakaria, author and journalist, offered insights about the American soul, starting with how democracy is insufficient. At its worst, democracy means mob rule. Populism can become demonic: whether the tyranny of the few or the tyranny of the majority. How come McConnell doesn’t mind changing Senate rules for his schemes, yet aghast (or giggling) when Democrats try? We enter rough surf whenever group rights displace individual rights, whenever mutinous partisan interests bully, cheat, or bribe to get what they demand. I recently echoed what I’ve quipped for decades, how the only thing worse than a self-righteous intolerant conservative is a self-righteous intolerant liberal.

A Republic requires leaders of conscience, honor, and accomplishment rather than seismographs. Our Senators once viewed themselves first as members of the Senate, second as representatives of their state, third representing their political party. Americans before party. Winston Churchill was counseled to keep his ear to the ground. His reply? “The British nation will find it very hard to look up to leaders who are detected in that position.” Alexander Hamilton envisioned a Republic where ministers, lawyers, and professors would remain neutral so they could guide the nation as respected and trusted arbiters and reconcilers between factions, as disinterested interpreters of weightier matters.

Providentially, we remain a Republic instead of absolute democracy. The sail for our ship of state is our democratic ethos pulling us forward. But without keel, ballast, and rudder of constitutional principles, this Mayflower is going to sink. The Pilgrims didn’t board the Mayflower and establish the Massachusetts Bay Colony to practice freedom of religion. That’s popular fiction. They came to establish a Holy Commonwealth, a city of God, a theocracy ruled by their doctrines. By 1740, the colonists realized a Holy Commonwealth wasn’t going to happen. America was becoming America with its unruly outpouring of religious expressions, with its rugged spirit of independence.

Mid 1700’s, Jonathan Edwards, America’s finest theologian, quickly saw how the church too was entering a new age, where town meeting and church meeting weren’t the same, where faith came by conversion rather than by citizenship, where it is our mutual obligation to these constitutional principles that binds us together. Unity isn’t conformity. Will we jettison petty litmus tests imposed from left and right? Loud cries about ‘wokeness,’ whether as aspiration or criticism, are tedious. Come, let us reason together.

We are better for this civil obligation. It’s harder, but far better, as modern times show. We are crewing toward a more perfect union. Who would foolishly want to live in yesteryear America? This ship of state is improving, despite dangers of woodworm, storms, ripped sails, leaks. Election Day, 2020 – how close we came to America’s shipwreck! Despite reactionary spasms, we can smile at our progress in human

rights, in opportunities for women, in a willingness to be forthright about our history. Child labor abolished. Food quality regulations. Environmental protection. Monopolies curtailed. Secure elections (well, at least last November's). Interracial marriage acceptance (acknowledging we really are one race). Auto air-bags. Lead-free gasoline. Glad we altered the pledge salute too. One day a young church couple, very active in the Republican Party (when the Republican Party was still the Republican Party), confided how they finally couldn't oppose gay marriage. They admitted: "How does gay marriage affect us?"

When hasn't knowledge prevailed, ultimately? When haven't the classical liberal humanistic worldview and causes become mainstream, ultimately?

America is people rather than place. For America to continue to succeed, we the people each are responsible, chosen to make it succeed, the difference between being ruled by and being governed. There is no room for violent extremists nor patience for falsehoods, conspiracy theories, dumb 'culture wars,' whether from Mar-a-Lago, Facebook, TV pundits, or newspapers. Which also means we must weigh which are the larger threats, problems, needs, versus ancillary. Violent crime. Misguided militias. Mass murders. Gun safety. Effective law enforcement. Wreckage from pointless wars. Protection of civil rights. Prosperity opportunity. Climate change. Health care costs. Addictions. Homelessness.

All hands on deck!