

Who remembers dialing long distance?

The Danville News

Robert John Andres

Thursday, March 14, 2024

“Amerika First”

Word Count: 750

What do Spain, Lithuania, Germany, Argentina, Croatia, Jamaica, Slovenia, Turkey, Belgium, Serbia, Finland, and Australia have in common? Basketball players playing for US collegiate teams. You’ve seen some of them this March Madness. So what’s this nonsense about isolationism and America First?

Isolationism is an impossible, implausible, impractical endeavor, a fool’s errand, a left handed screwdriver, a political snipe hunt, like trying to rake a lake.

Isolationism worked so well for the 17<sup>th</sup> Century Japanese and three centuries later when isolationism incubated into rabid nationalism and imperialistic arrogance. It worked so well for Charles Lindbergh and the pro-Nazi American First Committee, fomenting fear and hatred. Cheerleading for American isolationism has been an excuse for racism, anti-Semitism, white supremacy. Lindbergh may have been a talented pilot but he was a man with terrible values. The Greatest Generation figured out what to do with Nazis.

Is isolationism even possible today? On the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Pearl Harbor I asked Dad about what Pearl Harbor meant to him. He told me how they knew from the radio announcement that it was important, but, son, you need to understand how nobody really knew what Pearl Harbor was. Who knew about Hawaii? It was another world, far, far away. My wife’s grandfather was captured in World War I by the Ottoman Army when the British surrendered Kut-al-Amara in Mesopotamia. It took months for Elaine’s grandmother and the rest of England to receive word that they were Turkish Prisoners-of-War. How different those wars from CNN newscaster Peter Arnette in 1991 broadcasting live from Baghdad a play-by-play of our bombardment. Come 2024? Instant streams of unfiltered news including barrages of gossip and propaganda.

On my first trip to England in 1972 I carried American Express Traveler’s Checks to cash in for pound notes. On my last trip to England, I used my credit and debit card. Nowadays, those oceans are mere puddles. Who remembers dialing long distance?

Isolationism – along with her four stepchildren bans, family separation, internment camps, mass deportation – poisons our blood, enfeebles us. How effective were China’s Great Wall, Hadrian’s Wall, Berlin Wall? Sure, we must improve how we legally process immigrants. O’ wait, a bi-partisan bill showed us how until MAGA aborted it. True Americans value our immigrants rather than vilify them. To disparage them disparages ourselves. Well, we did it before with ‘Irish need not apply,’ with Chinese railroad workers, with Jewish and Italian ghettos in New York City. Historian David McCullough writing about the May 1889 Johnstown

flood told how the victims vented their rage upon Hungarian immigrants despite the disaster being caused by rich robber barons building their fancy resort. Just wondering, where did you come from?

I suppose I'm going to have to repeat myself: Our USA is not a Christian nation. I add, speaking as an evangelical authority: Nor should it be. There's a marked difference between being a Christian nation and being historically inspired by the Reformed Protestant ethos. Are we to be grouped with Afghanistan, Iran, among other stale theocracies? "Of all the 'ocracies," James Fenimore Cooper teased, "hypocrisy is the most flourishing." Yes, the principles of Reformed Protestantism supplied the rootstock of what fruited forth as these United States. Never forget that an essential tenet of Reformed Protestantism recoils at an established state religion. Why? We worry whenever religion and state merge, a gangrenous symptom of despotism. The First Amendment wasn't written to hinder religion from engaging in matters of state. It was written to hinder the state from messing with us. Can you caterwaul and bray about America First when you trash the Constitution and attack those who administer justice? Why hasn't Trump called off his dogs?

We were founded because we were meant to be the rarest jewel of countries, a country constituted by persons from the entire world yearning for freedom and equality, a nation of ideals, merit, and opportunity, to be a good and gracious land. Thank you for seeing us in this optimistic light. You honor us. Come and uphold the law. Come and contribute. Come and improve America, still a work in progress. We are called the New World for a reason. Here's a club to which you can belong and be proud of. Besides, given you and me, we're not particularly exclusive.

Evidently, today's brand of isolationism isn't as uncompromising as it was years ago. Fondness for isolationism apparently need not apply when it comes to sinking baskets or wanting to make a buck, Ruble, Yuan, or Saudi riyah.