

A Rousing Conversation

Written by Margaret Evans, Editor



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Sometimes, a conversation on social media is so interesting it begs to be committed to print. When that happens on deadline day, I rejoice at my good fortune and give thanks for the copy-and-paste function on my computer.

On July 6th, still nursing mixed emotions after a bittersweet 4th, I posted the following thought on Facebook:

"Lately, I keep hearing liberals waxing poetic about the "good" conservatives of yore – Reagan, Bush, Romney, etc. – and conservatives longing for the way liberals "used to be" – tolerant, open-minded, compassionate – and it makes me wonder: If our two rival tribes had respected each other more back in the day – treated each other as honorable opponents instead of evil miscreants to be destroyed – would we be in a better place now? I think we would be, but I don't see us learning that lesson. It feels like we dug our own hole and we're determined to just keep digging."

What unfolded next was a conversation – conversations within conversations, actually – reflecting such a wide range of opinions and rollicking personalities, I felt like I was hosting a microcosm of America right there on my little ol' Facebook page. I tried to keep up, to moderate like a good moderate. I warned my FB friends that they might appear in this column, promising to protect their anonymity by giving them glam soap opera names like Thorne and Ridge. In the end, I just dropped the names entirely. I hope y'all can follow what follows . . .

Some folks agreed with my post.

They left comments like “Hear, hear!” and “You nailed it!”

Others proposed their own theories about how we got where we are.

“I think it all started when the equal time rule was abandoned on our public airwaves. Before that, challenges to extreme views could be made and both sides presented. Now any fool can say any preposterous thing and it is treated as factual.”

“I think the biggest change came when Gingrich made folks go home to raise money instead of stay in DC. Opponents used to be friends because their kids went to the same schools and they had time to golf, hunt, play cards and develop alliances across the aisles. Now the families don’t move to DC and everyone scatters for fundraising at home the minute Congress adjourns.”

“I think as we are more connected with social media, our socialization and manners have been thrown out the window. Coming together has ultimately torn us apart.”

“And the more polarized we become, the harder we’ll dig. It’s a positive feedback loop that I’m afraid can’t be turned back without an enormous external shock to the system.”

Still others found my original premise flawed.

“Margaret, I don’t believe liberals are cherishing the likes of conservatives such as Reagan.”

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Me: Maybe you're not, but I've heard many a liberal hold Reagan up as a paragon of virtue lately. I recognize it's all relative.

□□□□□□□□□□ "The Left – you know, the Democrats – have been in full DESTROY AMERICA mode for 50 years and the spineless mewling of those bemoaning the 'loss of civility on both sides' is just pitiful blather."

(That's me he's talking about. I'm the spineless mewler.)

"Liberals waxing poetic about the 'good' conservatives of yore? What one must remember is that back when Reagan, Bush, et al. were in power there was NO respect given to them whatsoever by their political opponents, at least apart from the annual SOTU address. Terrible, vile and hateful things were said about them (and still are by some)."

Me: Kind of my point. For decades, basically decent people were characterized as "terrible, vile, hateful" monsters by the cultural powers-that-be. Eventually, people got sick of it, stopped believing it . . . and voted for Trump. It was a case of 'crying wolf' one time too many. And now here we are.

□□□□□□□□□□ The old political paradigms are no more. It's no longer Dems v. Reps. The Deplorables consider both parties of the past to be one and the same. The big shift is now us v. the corrupt elite. It will all come out in due time."

Me: Wait, by "us" you mean Deplorables, right? Deplorables vs. Corrupt Elite?

□□□□□□□□□□ Anyone who fondly remembers "back in the day" has forgotten how nasty back in the day could be."

Me: Or maybe I just didn't KNOW how nasty it was?

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□□□□□□□□□□ Bingo! It's been this way since our founding."

Me: But wasn't there a time when Congress was actually functional, Americans could rally behind their president even if they didn't like him, we didn't "hate" people from the other party, and we felt like "fellow Americans"? Or did I imagine all that?

"The Adams-Jefferson rivalry (and the factions they represent) was more vicious than anything we've witnessed recently. The rivalry between Adams' son and Andrew Jackson might have been even more virulent. And let's not forget, there was a certain presidential election that more or less precipitated secession and a Civil War. Nonetheless, I'm not so sure what we've had more recently is actually preferable. Consider that for all the sniping back and forth, supposedly 'small government' Republicans have greatly enlarged its scope, and Democrats who are supposedly for the 'little man' sure find it easy to cozy up to Wall Street. I'm not suggesting there are no substantive policy differences between the parties or between politicians; but I am suggesting that, in the main, politicians eventually come to value maintenance of their own power above all else. The sniping is a convenient way to rouse the voting base."

Me: Okay. Well, that perspective definitely makes it all seem less crucial and infinitely more futile. Which is kind of a relief, actually. I may just retreat into birding and reading philosophy and singing in my church choir. To hell with it.

□□□□□□□□□□ **Then there ~~was~~this conversation, which made a bit too much sense for my personal comfort.**

"What if partisans have been arguing a false dialectic that's been given to them to keep everyone busy?"

Me: I hear that theory a lot, but I'm never quite sure who the culprit is. Is there a cabal meeting in a smoky back room somewhere?

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□□□□□□□□□□“Maybe. Not sure.”

“Not to put words in (his) mouth, but let me attempt a metaphor. Major League Baseball loves a frothing Red Sox-Yankees rivalry for a reason: It's good for business.”

Me: Okay, I'm following y'all. But I'm still wondering if this is an organized effort by a small club of evil masterminds . . . or just an organic thing with a life of its own?

□□□□□□□□□□“I don't find it so unbelievable that a small group of humans has acquired the knowledge and wherewithal to control the masses, and that we have been given a complete illusion about how the world works, who we are, the true nature of our origin and collective history, international relations, etc. I've grown to feel that literally nothing about our culture is quite as genuine and organic as we would like to believe.”

Me: I don't find it “unbelievable,” either. But if there really is a man behind the curtain, I want to know who it is! I've been a girl detective since my Nancy Drew days, and I can't stop now.

“Who needs a mastermind when you have a perverse culture born of highly centralized, highly remote authority?”

□□□□□□□□□□ *Me: Good point. I suspect this vexing mystery – and its unsolvable nature – is why some of us retreat into birding.*

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