

A STEP BACK

In my essays recently I've been diving into the whole idea of racism and the multi-cultural ideal. This time, I'm going to try to take a step back and look at the broader picture of what is happening to my country.

There's been a change in the level of civility even at my level of citizenship, let alone at the governing levels.

There's a feeling of divisiveness even among my neighbors and the people that I interface with. If you're perceived as being socially liberal, there's now a certain coldness between you and those that are religiously conservative. The harshness of the rhetoric between the proponents and opponents of same-sex marriage has only increased in the last ten years. Likewise the divide over abortion has deepened and widened in the last generation primarily along a religious divide.

If you're viewed as a small government conservative, your political opponents will call you a miser that is unwilling to help their fellow citizens. In return, those perceived as conservatives will accuse you liberals of harboring illegal immigrants, enabling welfare cheats and spending on medical care for many that don't deserve it.

I understand the need for discussion and debate. I understand that there are differences of opinion that run rampant. What I don't understand is the unwillingness in both camps to listen to the other side of the argument and at least be open to their side of the issue. Far too often, rather than actually discussing the merits or downsides of a situation, the rhetoric becomes heated and personal, spiraling down in some cases to physical violence.

Many of these issues are tearing families apart that no longer even speak to each other. I find myself not wanting to talk much to people that I don't know for fear that I might say something to set them off. Altercations are more apt to result on screaming matches and the law being called to settle the dispute than in years past.

We have become a divided society on any number of levels. I can liken it to a pane of safety glass on your automobile that has been hit by a rock. It isn't just one crack, it's a maze of breaks that, when tapped hard for the second time, shatters into a thousand pieces. We as a country have been hit by the rock, and a hard tap will shatter our civilization into those thousand shards.

It's happened once before with the Civil War. Those fractures have yet to heal. Could it happen again? While it's still more whim than movement, California is talking secession because it doesn't mesh with

the rest of the country. Parts of northern California and southern Oregon have talked for years about becoming the state of Jefferson because of differences between the area and much of their surrounding urbanized areas. Other regional compacts have been proposed, and the original Confederacy as a movement is still alive and well.

If we had to face it, we'd find that there's a White America, a Black America, a Hispanic America, and an Asian America. Each of these segments sees radically differences in culture, heritage, language and race. Each of them has subcultures that divide the main segment into fragments. There's western white culture against liberal east coast white culture. There's southern black culture contrasting with northern black environments. Hispanics split along Mexican versus Central American lines. Asians have multiple breaks between Japanese, Chinese, Indonesian and Indian subcultures.

There has always been friction between all these groups. But they always managed (for the most part) to get along under the more general umbrella of the United States. These days, it seems that the tolerance level for differences is fraying and the segmentation is becoming more strict and strident.

These divides aren't just racial or ethnic. They also split along economic and religious lines. You can have economically deprived Catholics who are both liberal and conservative. You can have monied conservatives and conservative citizens in coal country in poverty. Yet if you subdivide enough, the whole thing falls apart, like the fractured auto glass.

It seems that politics has mastered the art of divide and conquer. And if the Russians added fuel to the mixture, they're probably rubbing their cyber hands together and counting their blessings in having stoked the discord and disharmony in the political system. Something definitely has happened to sow division in our social structure. We trust no one and have faith in very few of the institutions of government that have kept us going for the last two hundred years.

Make America Great Again is working, but not in the intended manner. We are making America more greatly divided and culturally, economically and racially separate than has been the case since the Civil War. I hope that we can find a way to put the glass back together before it shatters.