

KeyOpinion

Independence Day — 2008

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*Oh say, does that star-spangled
Banner yet wave
O'er the land of the free
And the home of the brave?*

(Francis Scott Key, 1814)

Today, July 4, marks the 232nd birthday of our remarkable country. As nations go, and compared to the ancient civilizations of Europe and Asia, we are still young.

The United States of America was a brave and noble experiment when the colonists started their revolution against mighty England. Many were certain that the rag-tag armies under Gen. George Washington could never prevail against the highly trained redcoats sent by King George III, but dedication to the cause of freedom ultimately succeeded against the well-disciplined foe.

The following years have not been without controversy and strife. Blood has been shed and lives lost in defense of the ideals incorporated in our Declaration of Independence.

The horrendous civil war that pitted brother against brother under the leadership of President Abraham Lincoln finally cemented the disparate states into a unified country, and subsequent warfare over the years in defense of freedom cost countless lives.

But the dream lives on.

No one can seriously question whether the United States is the "home of the brave." The sacrifices of our fighting men and women over the years have proven that, from the battlefields of the Revolution to the current hostilities in Afghanistan and Iraq.

Are we, however, still the "land of the free?"

It might be said that the answer depends on the definition of "free." After all, one of our recent presidents questioned "what the definition of 'is' is," and freedom is a much more complicated concept.

There was a period of time before the Civil War when freedom did not extend to all human beings — blacks were kidnapped and brought to these shores to be bought and sold like cattle and held in slavery.

There was a period — not too long ago — when women were denied the right to vote and were considered the "property" of their fathers and husbands. The fact is that during more than half of the life of this nation, its female population was not truly free.

Although progress has been made, there has been a chipping away at the parameters of freedom in recent years. Americans are free to speak their minds and to thumb their noses at authority, if they so choose, but they are no longer free to smoke a Cuban cigar or to travel to that island country to obtain one.

Under the leadership of the Bush brothers, both the federal government and the state of Florida attempted to interfere in the private, medical decision of the Schiavo next of kin to withhold tube feeding of a permanently vegetative family member.

And in the name of fighting terrorism, there has been a wholesale erosion of the individual right to privacy and the protections afforded by the judicial system.

Sadly, on the international scene, the goodwill and respect earned over the years has eroded as the current leadership engaged in a bullying "cowboy diplomacy," running roughshod over this country's traditions and engaging in warfare on false premises.

Nearly three quarters of our citizens now feel that we are headed in the wrong direction, and there is a powerful need for change.

For the first time in history, one of our two major political parties is about to nominate a non-white as its candidate for president.



Foreign headlines have bannered the news, and citizens of nations around the world have expressed amazement and approval. There is renewed hope that the United States has regained its moral compass.

The fact that the Democratic candidate has made it this far speaks well for the future, even if he fails to gain the votes necessary for election.

He will not garner the support of the 28 percent of the electorate who see nothing wrong with the way this country has been heading.

There are also a sizable number of closet rednecks who cannot bring themselves to vote for a non-white individual, no matter how qualified. These are the same people who cry that the candidate "lacks experience," although many of them enthusiastically supported an inexperienced Texan for the post eight years ago.

The fact is that the position of leader of the world's most powerful democracy is unique, and there is no experience in any other capacity that trains one for the position — not vice-president, not navy pilot, not hero prisoner of war, not marriage to a president and not years in a soporific debating society such as the U.S. Senate.

There will be no votes coming from those individuals who allege the candidate is "elitist," although calling a black man "elite" represents progress from the old days, when they would have termed him "uppity."

And then there are the negativists who will vote against the Democratic candidate because his wife is not sufficiently "Stepford" and lacking in the appropriately adoring gaze with every word her husband utters.

It's going to be an interesting election.

Hopefully, the winner will prove to be a leader with common sense, who can control his temper, even when the phone goes off at 3 a.m.

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Curmudgeonly observations on energy, patriotism

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Patriotism is a big topic on the presidential campaign trail this Fourth of July. Wesley Clark, general nag and Obama military adviser, opined that getting shot down and becoming a prisoner of war was not a qualification for the presidency. I think he was correct but, unfortunately for him, Sen. Barack Obama did not agree.

So Clark joined Barack's grandmother, Rev. Wright, Father Pfleger and Bill Ayers under the bus. Hard to blame Barack for this one. The hardest problem for any Democrat is establishing his patriotic bonafides, and seeming to attack a war hero just doesn't get it done.

There is a question of just how does anyone establish patriotic bonafides. Since this is the campaign silly season, wearing a flag pin has come to be important. I don't think it is important, because any unpatriotic fool can pin one on and some other fool can criticize someone for not wearing one. Making grand pronouncements doesn't really mean much.

In general, always assume, until proven otherwise, that one's true patriotism is in inverse proportion to the volume of public affirmations about it. You might also heed the warning of British sage, Samuel Johnson, who observed in 1720, "Patriotism is the last refuge of a scoundrel."

He later made it clear that he didn't mean real love of country, but the pretended patriotism which so many, of all ages and countries, have made a cloak of self-interest.

Adlai Stevenson, Democratic candidate for president in 1952 and 1956, gave us a workable definition of true patriotism.

"I venture to suggest that what we mean is a sense of national responsibility...a patriotism which is not short, frenzied outbursts of emotion, but the tranquil and steady dedication of a lifetime," he said.

If national responsibility is a component of patriotism, I question the wisdom of environmental organizations that oppose attempts to develop even alternative energy, and the patriotism of politicians in both parties who adhere to that policy in an effort to secure money and votes.

There is literally no type of energy, whether fossil or alternative, that escapes the veto of the Washington environmental nags regardless of our national predicament. Several solar energy projects have been delayed for at least three years, because environmentalists have lately come to the conclusion that placing solar panels about the landscape might harm some fragile plant or animal. Wind power, forget it. The blades and huge towers are nothing more than Cuisinarts for birds. Power generated by wave action, no way. Can't take the chance of ruining our pristine beaches. Biofuels might be alright, but use of food for fuel seems to be creating famine in the Third World. Nuclear is absolutely out of the question. Forget that France generates 80 percent of its electric power from nuclear energy. Have you forgotten Jane Fonda's heroic anti-nuke reporting in "The China Syndrome?"

Use of coal as a fuel is thought to be a war crime that should be punished by Nuremberg-type trials. Drilling in the Gulf is a no-no. It's the beaches and their pristine condition again. We must be content to leave the Gulf to the Cuba-China-India consortium now preparing to drill 60 miles off Key West.

ANWAR is verboten out of concern for global warming and the polar bear. Remember the picture of the bear on the floating ice? Remember the angst of the misguided who didn't know the picture was a fake and thought the bear was about to drown? Of course, hanging around the edge of the ice is what polar bears do. It



enables them to eat baby seals in large quantities. Baby seals are to polar bears what M&Ms are to candy lovers. The bears have been doing this since the dawn of time. It is what they did when all of Greenland was being farmed by the Norwegians.

The people who reject any attempt to use our own resources and want us to buy pollution credits from Third World countries have a very strange sense of what Adlai Stevenson called "national responsibility." Our economy, even if healthier than today, could not bear the additional carbon tax, especially when China and India have specifically rejected any such idea. In short, people who hang high gas prices and reduced economic opportunity around the necks of the poor and the middle class are not patriotic or humane, especially when they gin up false concern for polar bears that have survived climate change through the ages.

I don't think charging these people with a lack of patriotism, at least as Adlai Stevenson defined it, will cause them any distress. Columnist Thomas Sowell, in a recent column, observed, "Patriotism has long been viewed with suspicion or disdain by many of the intellectuals. As far back as 1793, prominent British writer William Godwin called patriotism 'high-sounding nonsense.'"

"Internationalism," according to Sowell, "has long been a competitor with patriotism, especially among the intellectuals."

H.G. Wells advocated replacing the idea of duty to one's country with "the idea of cosmopolitan duty." Wells never explained just what the hell he meant by "cosmopolitan duty." Maybe it is the same thing as buying pollution credits from Zimbabwe.

Just a suggestion: maybe we shouldn't worry about lapel pins but instead concentrate on who advocates policies designed to strengthen this country and on policies designed to free us from dependence on foreign energy.