

STEVEN P. DINKIN A Path Forward

# AMERICA: CELEBRATING OUR DIVERSE COUNTRY

Hold the hot dogs. This Fourth of July, I'm thinking of stew.

And while everyone seems to have (and swear by) their own recipe, there are a few areas of agreement. Stew needs plenty of cooking time to develop great flavor. Along with meat — and potatoes and carrots, traditionally — any vegetable is a welcome addition to the pot. Every ingredient livens up the broth.

America is the perfect stew. The longer we cook, the better we get. The diversity of our people — themselves the products of many different racial and ethnic influences — makes us richer as a nation, and more flavorful. In our great multicultural stew, all of the elements contribute something but also retain their individual tastes.

I much prefer that over the term “melting pot.” The latter harkens back to the 1780s and describes a homogenizing of America, with people of different backgrounds coming together to adopt a common culture. Even my 9th-grade history teacher, Mrs. Kiefer, preferred to describe America as a “salad bowl,” where

cultures mix but remain distinct.

If there's a bright spot in the anguish of the condominium collapse in Surfside, Fla., it's in the stories we're hearing of the people who lived there. A beautiful multicultural mosaic pulsed through its walls. Many languages were spoken — not just English and Spanish, but Hebrew and Russian, too. Residents hailed from many countries, including Argentina, Australia, Cuba, Israel and Venezuela. Hanukkah and Christmas were celebrated as co-equal holidays. Salsa music played at poolside barbecues.

The Surfside condo is a microcosm of Miami-Dade County — which is itself a microcosm of the United States.

While the full results of the 2020 census won't be released until sometime next year, demographers predict that the headline will be our diversity. According to William Frey, a senior fellow at the Brookings Institution, U.S. population estimates show that nearly 4 of 10 Americans identify with a race or ethnic group other than White.

Those estimates also suggest

that 2010 to 2020 will be the first decade in our nation's history in which the White population declined in size.

Over the first nine years of that decade, the U.S. grew by 19.5 million people — a growth rate of 6.3 percent. Racial and ethnic minorities accounted for all of this growth: Hispanic, Asian American and Black populations increased by 20 percent, 29 percent and 8.5 percent, respectively. Frey noted that many states, counties and cities would have lost population if not for people of color.

Diversity enriches our nation and makes it a more interesting place to live. People from diverse cultures contribute fresh thinking, new knowledge and different experiences.

The exposure to other cultures makes us more compassionate human beings. Our perspectives broaden as we consider new points of view. And rather than just tolerating differences, we learn to celebrate them — hopefully.

With compassion comes the acknowledgment that everyone has innate value and deserves to

be treated as an equal. Polarization gives way to inclusivity as we accept the obvious: We're all in this together, and we're more alike than we are different.

Just as diversity makes us more compassionate, it makes us smarter too. Research has found that exposure to diversity can change the way we think and lead to better decision making and problem solving. It can also foster creativity and innovation.

In a homogenous group, perspectives and beliefs are generally shared. Consensus is more easily reached. But in diverse groups, differences of opinion are expected.

To reach consensus, members must open their minds. Researchers say that people work harder in diverse environments, both cognitively and socially. That hard work can lead to better outcomes — and create better people.

It's no wonder then that workplaces value racial and ethnic diversity and emphasize it in their hiring and promotion practices. A 2020 McKinsey & Company report found that companies in the top quartile for racial and ethnic

diversity were 36 percent more profitable than companies in the fourth quartile, continuing an upward trend.

Remember last Fourth of July? It was difficult to feel good about America. We were facing multiple crises: an uphill battle against COVID-19; an overdue acknowledgment of systemic racism in policing, following the senseless murder of George Floyd; and an economy in peril. There wasn't much reason for flag waving.

This year, I'm feeling a bit more celebratory and optimistic. Truth be told, I won't be having stew today. I'll be eating bratwurst. It's a German sausage made from a perfect mixture of different meats and spices. And it's a staple in Milwaukee, Wis., where I grew up. When boiled in Pabst Blue Ribbon beer before grilling, a brat is perfection on a bun — and unmistakably American.

Dinkin is president of the National Conflict Resolution Center, a San Diego-based group working to create solutions to challenging issues, including intolerance and incivility. To learn about NCRC's programming, visit [nccrconline.com](http://nccrconline.com)

## NONPROFIT

FROM **B1**

bers. A daughter of immigrants, she is responsible for coordinating local partnerships and collaborating with other outreach organizations.

“I've always been around organizations that help with the immigrant situation,” said Rodriguez, 32. “It really touches my heart. It was second nature for me to jump in and help lead the organization.”

Becky Diaz, 29, La Chula Crew's outreach coordinator, said she was drawn to the organization because she had experienced bouts of poverty when she was growing up. As an adult, she wanted to try to make things better for people with similar experiences.

“I joined because it's going to help someone,” she said. “Maybe somebody sees the events and they don't need (resources) but they know somebody that does. It's just about helping everyone in the community.”

One person who recently received a helping hand, was Marcella Esquivel, a mother of three who was experiencing homelessness. Because of a change in her housing situation, Esquivel and her family were sleeping in their car while waiting for rapid rehousing. And then another setback hit: her car broke down.

She said she reached out to the La Chula Crew and within a week was able to get her car fixed.

“I was at a brick wall and as soon as I reached out to them, they greeted me with a hug,” Esquivel said. “It's truly a blessing to be in-



Nonprofit La Chula Crew's Chelsea Muniz (left), offers food and support to homeless individuals Wednesday on Imperial Avenue near 17th Street in downtown San Diego.

volved with people who are genuine.”

Social worker Jacqueline Lopez, 28, became the volunteer coordinator just six months ago after going through a separation. She said she believed the best way for her to heal was to “pour her

heart out in the community.” She helps collect donations and distribute them to the people the organization serves.

“I'm hoping this shows (the community) we are there for one another,” she said. “Although we needed a pandemic to show us ...

that we could really rally together no matter how bad (expletive) got.”

The La Chula Crew accepts monetary donations via its website. The nonprofit also accepts donations of money or items, including clothes, diapers and hand sani-

tizer, at its monthly events and workshops assault and domestic violence. Several events are planned for July and are posted to the group's website and shared on social media.

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## CLARK

FROM **B1**

challenges of the past year and the growing animosity in our political discourse.

Heck, that's part of what is gnawing at the back of my mind when I try to lean into the celebration. I'm hung up on the reality of how much further we have to go to fully embody our nation's ideals.

I do love this country in spite of its flaws, though, and I love it because I still believe most Americans are decent people. There are countless times throughout history when plenty of Americans have displayed genuine selflessness, ingenuity, heroism and compassion.

This Fourth of July, that last part is really what I'm focusing on — compassion — especially when I think back to how so many of us had to spend the holiday isolated last year.

The past year has been difficult. Many people have seen things they worked their whole life for crumble. Businesses have shuttered, families have been torn apart, homes have been lost, people have had their faith in their fellow Americans shaken politically, folks have struggled with isolation and its impact on their mental health and well-being.

Most tragic of all, so many people this year have lost the one thing that is truly irreplaceable: people they love.

Whether it was because of a horrific pandemic or something else, so many people are going to experience this holiday — when families and friends come together for barbecues, picnics and parties — with a little piece of themselves missing.

That hurts, regardless of who you are, where you call home, what you believe or your political views.



At the same time, perhaps more than any time in my lifetime, we saw many examples of American exceptionalism and compassion here in San Diego and throughout this country this past year.

We've seen communities organize fundraisers for struggling businesses and families.

We've seen college students step up to grocery shop and provide friendship to isolated seniors.

We've seen many folks organize food drives, including people and businesses who were struggling.

We've seen countless health care workers and first responders put themselves at risk to care for and

save others.

We've seen teachers find innovative ways to reach out to students, even as they were torn apart by circumstance.

I could go on and on. The point is, this year we've seen many people engage in acts of kindness, big and small, to support their fellow Americans.

**Cody Hathaway and Joann Barnett place packages of meat and jerky in the window of a vehicle in the parking lot of Kennedy's Meat Company in Escondido last year. It was one of many compassionate acts during the pandemic.**

CHARLIE NEUMAN

Heck, I got immense joy last summer, when I was in a dark place and unable to see my parents, simply by walking around my neighborhood and seeing the friendly smiles at a distance, the lovely garden someone painstakingly cared for or the chalk art kids drew throughout the area.

I guess I just want to say thank you to every one of you who found a way to lend a helping hand to folks who were struggling during a terrible year and half. You really exemplified American compassion, exceptionalism and the values that make our country truly great.

I hope you are with your loved ones and your friends this Independence Day. I hope you're enjoying fantastic food, relaxing and taking in nature or whatever brings you joy — even if that means some fireworks or a parade.

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## SMOLENS

FROM **B1**

Voting results have often been disputed and claims of stolen elections are as American as the notion of ballot-box stuffing. Read up on John F. Kennedy's hairbreadth victory over Richard Nixon in the 1960 presidential election and you'll see that some of what was said then was heard in the aftermath of the 2020 election.

Granted, nobody stormed the Capitol.

Some people truly believe, wrongly, that Trump was robbed of last year's election. A disturbingly large number of people believe in even wilder related conspiracy theories. What's worse is there are others who don't really buy any of that, yet placate or encourage the believers in an effort to gain political power.

Engaging in sharp-edged, and sometimes delusional, politics may seem like an odd route to achieving “life,

liberty and the pursuit of happiness.” But remember, this is a nation of contradictions. Those are admirable goals, even if they can't always be achieved.

While we're on the subject, it's high time we have a realistic conversation about who and what the “Founding Fathers” really were. They were high-minded thinkers, hard-eyed tacticians and some were slave owners. Their business interests in some cases would benefit from separating from England.

“They could write like angels and scheme like demons,” is how Edward J. Larson opens his book “A Magnificent Catastrophe” about the first real presidential election campaign in 1800.

These people produced a couple of masterpieces: the Declaration of Independence and the U.S. Constitution. They included noble concepts of freedom of speech and religion, legal protections like due process and an overarching sense of

fairness and, yes, equality.

In reality, we know those aren't applied uniformly and never have been — especially for those who are not White men.

The role of some of the founders as slave owners was wrong at the time, of course, but significantly, that shaped the country and its economy throughout its history.

It's important for people to know — and accept — that this country is, in large part, the product of slave labor and ruthless actions. We must also recognize how that continues to affect society. Cherry-tree myths don't cut it anymore.

A dispute about slavery is why Independence Day is July 4 and not July 2, according to a National Geographic article on how the Fourth of July came to be.

On the earlier date in 1776, the Continental Congress passed a resolution declaring independence from England. But there was opposition to a passage in the actual Declaration of

Independence document drafted by Thomas Jefferson that criticized King George III for sanctioning the slave trade, according to the article.

He also accused the king of encouraging enslaved people in the colonies to escape and join British forces.

Members of the Congress “knew that the colonies' economy was largely based on the labor of enslaved people,” National Geographic wrote. “Many delegates, including Jefferson himself, held slaves and personally profited from their labor.”

“Instead of laying the foundation for the abolition of slavery, the Congress deleted the controversial passage...”

The declaration was then adopted on July 4.

I wish I had learned that in school.

Author Margaret Kimberley has an even more critical take on the founders' motivations regarding enterprise and protecting

slavery in a recent piece titled “The Terrible Origins of July 4th” published in the Black Agenda Report.

Now, I'm not here to douse today's fireworks and barbecue grills. But maybe separating the myths from reality, or understanding the nation's contradictions, might give the holiday a new — and greater — meaning. That may be wishful thinking.

At least a broad understanding of how generations of Blacks have been deprived of the ability to build wealth while others did because their ancestors were enslaved and subsequently deprived of economic opportunities might move the country forward. That goes for others who have been wronged and exploited, from Native Americans to Chinese railroad workers to many Latinos.

That's why the push to ban teaching of ethnic studies or critical race theory or anything that helps enlighten us on how we got here is not just depressing, it's

dangerous. In so many ways, efforts to expand knowledge and understanding has made this country great — opposing that is un-American.

I'm going to end with a line from a favorite song by the great Dave Alvin called “Fourth of July.” It's about an individual's grim relationship that could serve as a metaphor for how some people relate to the country today, yet it ends with a glimmer of hope.

*“Whatever happened, I apologize. So dry your tears, and baby, walk outside. It's the Fourth of July.”*

**Tweet of the week**

Goes to Jack Pitney (@jpitney), political science professor, Claremont McKenna College

“I've been teaching college for 35 years. I know what students look like when they haven't done the reading. That's what @Caitlyn\_Jenner looks like.”

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