

The Delray Democrat

Healing a Nation, from FDR to JRB¹

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On January 6, 2021, the traitors and crypto-fascists in the Republican Party, led by their Criminal-in-Chief, failed to overthrow our democracy. Joseph R. Biden will be inaugurated on January 20, 2021.

Donald Trump has sulked and plotted and raged since losing in a landslide. But he has also provided two parting gifts to democracy, the country, and the planet as he prepares to leave the White House for whatever jurisdiction will have him. His Palm Beach neighbors don't want him, and Scotland won't even let him visit, but maybe there's room for him in the Big House.

Trump's first gift is Georgia. Not to take anything away from the one and only Stacey Abrams and the volunteers who worked so tirelessly to elect Raphael Warnock and Jon Ossoff, but Trump lightened their load by depressing the Republican turnout. Flipping the Senate is a gift that cannot be undervalued.

When Barack Obama and Franklin Delano Roosevelt were called upon to clean up disasters left by their respective Republican predecessors, they had solid majorities in Congress. Even a fragile majority is critical to Biden's success.

Trump's second gift is subtler but equally significant. FDR's success was fueled in part by mobilizing the nation against a common enemy. See "When FDR Led a United States," on page 2. It's a long time since we've had a common enemy.

A relative bipartisanship prevailed for a half century before it was shattered by Newt Gingrich, a one-time assistant professor at a small college in Georgia and the archetype of "a stupid person's idea of what a smart person sounds like." Gingrich taught Republicans to place party over country and winning over everything. He later resigned from Congress amid failure and scandal, but Republicans learned their lessons well.

When America was poised on a precipice after the 2008 crash, not a single House Republican and only three Republican senators signed the legislation that prevented a Great Depression II. And in 2010, with the country just beginning to emerge from the Great Recession, Mitch McConnell declared that his party's principal goal was to ensure Obama was a one-term president.

Yet something seemed to snap after Trump's thugs stormed the citadel of our democracy, threatening Republicans and Democrats alike and appalling the nation and the world. As Trump retreated to the safety of the White House, gloating over the chaos he'd unleashed; as he refused

¹ *The Delray Democrat*, January 2021, p. 1.

pleas to call out the National Guard; and as Congress was forced to huddle in a “safe space,” a sliver of hope emerged.

Might Republicans finally begin to recognize (and join Democrats to defeat) the common enemies that have been in plain sight since the day Trump declared his candidacy, namely, the ignorance, resentment, and racism that follow in his wake like the slime trail left by a slug?

It’s likely a fond hope, one akin to Biden’s belief that Republicans will work with him for the good of the nation. I doubt Mitch McConnell’s goals are any different than in 2010.

Moreover, Biden lacks both the majority and the temperament to echo FDR, who famously said of the monopolists, bankers, and speculators who opposed and despised him, “I welcome their hatred.”

But remember that even FDR wasn’t FDR until he became FDR, that is, until he seized the exigencies of the moment to become our greatest president since Abraham Lincoln.

It’s now Joe Biden’s moment, and he has some wind at his back. Once the vaccine has been distributed, the economy can reopen and the recovery is likely to be swifter than in 2009 or 1932. Biden’s personality, and a public yearning for competence and compassion after four years of chaos and cruelty, may help him heal and rebuild our nation. And if Republicans reject his olive branches, as they did Obama’s, perhaps Joe will find his inner FDR.

Who knows? Maybe one day our grandkids will tell their grandkids how JRB managed to complete FDR’s unfinished business, namely, his “Second Bill of Rights.” For more on that, see page 5.