

The Delray Democrat

A More Perfect Union¹

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The drafters of the United States Constitution would be sickened by the slogan, “Make America Great Again,” which sounds more like a translation of *Deutschland Uber Alles* than anything intended by the Founders whom Republicans so repeatedly and hypocritically invoke

The basis of “the more perfect Union” over which they labored the long hot summer of 1787 in Philadelphia was a Constitution that moved forward rather than backward. As Thomas Jefferson later [wrote](#), the U.S. Constitution was never designed to be frozen in time:

Some men look at Constitutions with sanctimonious reverence, & deem them . . . too sacred to be touched. They ascribe to the men of the preceding age a wisdom more than human, and suppose what they did to be beyond amendment . . . [but]. . . laws and institutions must go hand in hand with the progress of the human mind. As that becomes more developed, more enlightened, as new discoveries are made, new truths disclosed, and manners and opinions change with the change of circumstances, institutions must advance also, and keep pace with the times.

The historical backdrop for the Constitution was America’s original organizational document, the Articles of Confederation, under which the federal government had little power and the Thirteen States resembled separate countries. The great Twentieth Century jurist Benjamin Cardozo explained the difference as follows:

The Constitution was framed . . . upon the theory that the peoples of the several states must sink or swim together, and that in the long run prosperity and salvation are in union and not division.

In fits and starts, the generations who followed have given substance to that aspiration. We became a more perfect union and a better country when we emancipated the slaves, gave women the franchise, and when we created programs like Social Security, unemployment insurance, and Medicare, Medicaid, and Obamacare to assist the needy and protect the vulnerable.

We became a more perfect union and a better country when we passed laws – albeit a full century *after* the Civil War ended – guaranteeing African Americans the right to vote and protecting marginalized citizens from discrimination. We became a more perfect union and a better country when our Supreme Court recognized the right of women to control their own bodies and people to marry whomever they chose.

¹ [The Delray Democrat](#), November 2022, page 6.

But these advances threatened those who feared the loss of privileges afforded the white male, and Republicans exploited those fears to divide us and sow hatred for their own advancement. Richard Nixon provided the roadmap with his Southern Strategy and dog-whistle appeals to “Law and Order,” but the most effective messenger and the man who did the most damage was that genial huckster, Ronald Reagan.

Beneath his amiable affect and his “aw shucks” campaign slogan, “Let’s Make America Great Again,” lay his racist tropes of “Cadillac-driving Welfare Queens” and “Strapping Young Bucks using food stamps to buy T-bone steaks while you’re waiting in line to buy hamburger.” Thirty years later, *ecce bestia*, Donald Trump threw away the dog whistle and picked up a bullhorn, with his naked appeals to racism, cruelty, and fear.

For the white working class, whether seduced by Reagan or driven into frenzies by Trump, there was no mistaking the meaning of “Make America Great Again.” America’s “greatness” lay in the 1950s, a time when African Americans knew their place (in the back of the bus and not in the voting booths), women knew their place (in the kitchen and the nursery), and LGBTQ people knew their place (deep in the closet).

Republicans never mention the best part of the 1950s—the creation of a middle class that was the envy of the world—because neither they nor their paymasters have any wish to resurrect an era in which income inequality was at its lowest level in American history, courtesy of FDR and his New Deal.

It was a time when CEOs earned [20](#) times as much as the average worker, a far cry from today, when they are paid [351](#) times as much as the average worker; it was a time when the wealthiest Americans were taxed at a higher rate than average Americans instead of today, when they are taxed at a lower rate; it was a time when corporations contributed [33%](#) of the taxes collected by the Treasury, instead of today, when they contribute a measly [7%](#); and it was a time when [35%](#) of the workforce belonged to unions, instead of today when only [10.3%](#) of Americans are unionized. Unions keep wages fair – not only for their members but for non-union workers at companies that feared being targets of unionizing.

So where do we go from here? The Republican game plan is to double-down on culture wars and Big Lies, moving the country backwards to an era in which the stench of racism, hatred, fear, The Supreme Court and lower courts have been packed with revanchist zealots who are not content with simply undoing *Roe* but would like to return to the pre-Constitution era when the individual states had virtual autonomy and freedom to do as they wished.

Next on the agenda of the Sam Alito and is the overruling of *Obergefell*, returning to the States the decision on whose marriage is worthy of recognition—despite the fact that 70% of Americans support gay marriage.

As Steve Fradkin argues on page 2, they are hellbent on refighting the Civil War and destroying the dreams of our Founders.

