Opinion
News



by Michael Sean Winters

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To all of my French readers and other Francophiles, best wishes for a happy Bastille Day! *Le jour du gloire est arrivé!* Here is the great Jessye Norman singing "La Marseillaise" at the 1989 bicentennial celebration — and really, who else could have handled that powerful performance except Jessye! How the music world misses her still:

Favorite follow-up story of 2020? The St. Louis Post-Dispatch profiles Mark and Patricia McCloskey, the couple that went out into their front yard with guns as Black Lives Matter protesters peacefully marched by. Turns out, the couple is not exactly neighborly and has a long history of suing just about everyone within reach to throw their weight around.

At Slate, Lili Loofbourow argues that Twitter is responsible for the breakdown of "good-faith debate," not any illiberal tendencies manifesting themselves on both the left and the right. Bosh. The "hate speech" movement was well underway in the 1980s. That said, Twitter does not help, and it is important that political and cultural leaders do not mistake it for reality, as happens far too often. Many of Loofbourow's

indictments of the medium are spot-on, even if the overarching thesis is weak.

In The New York Times, some letters to the editor responding to an op-ed by Lucian K. Truscott IV, a direct descendant of Thomas Jefferson, who argued the Jefferson Memorial should be taken down. I shall only say this: If you are confident that if you had been born at Shadwell, a plantation in western Virginia, in 1743, but that unlike Jefferson, you would have seen through all the cultural and social biases to become an abolitionist, you think very highly of yourself. The discussion is fascinating as an exercise in anthropology, too: How historical ideas and personages interact and how we can remember the one without the other are endlessly fascinating topics.

At Politico, a big warning and wake-up call for Democrats already measuring for the drapes in the Oval Office: The number of new Republican voters has outpaced the number of new Democratic voters in recent months. We know from 2016 that the polls undercounted Donald Trump's support because pollsters did not think many of those supporters would bother to vote — they hadn't in the past. Now, with four years at the largest megaphone in the world, Trump may have reached even more people who share his views but had never bothered to vote.

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So, when I get snarky about political campaigns and how poorly they are often run, I am not the only one. This article at Politico Magazine about Congresswoman Elissa Slotkin, a Democrat who flipped a traditionally Republican seat in 2018, is important to read for a variety of reasons, not least its account of Trump's ability to "block out the sun." But this graph points to the essential problem with modern campaigns:

> These are the riddles each presidential campaign is gnawing on, relying on sophisticated voter outreach and data analytics programs to build models of an electorate they must persuade come November. But the truth is, the brightest minds inside these operations are often in the dark, usually for one reason: Their feet are not on the ground. Hillary Clinton's failure to visit Wisconsin in 2016 and Mitt Romney's absolute certainty that he would carry Ohio in 2012 are symptoms of the same illness, an approach to presidential year politics that is arrogant, top heavy and disconnected from average voters.

Here is some good news from The Bulletin: of Norwich, Connecticut: Here in rural Northeastern Connecticut, eastern bluebirds are making a comeback. The introduction of nonnative species in the 19th century caused their numbers to dwindle but conservation efforts are paying off.

I found this lovely video tribute to Ennio Morricone, the composer who died last week: A military or police band performs his haunting theme from the movie "The Mission," standing in front of the magnificent church of Sant'Ignazio in Rome.

[Michael Sean Winters covers the nexus of religion and politics for NCR.]

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