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QUOTE FOR THE DAY:

“He who knows only his side of the case knows little of that.” John Stuart Mill

FREEDOM OF SPEECH:

It’s no secret to any of us that having an election year on top of a pandemic and extensive social unrest is the worst kind of trifecta. In matters political many people with opposing views either out shout the other or stomp out of the room. Essentially saying, “My side is right and your’s represents an existential threat to our way of life.” It’s a shame. The world would do well to read more of John Stuart Mill.

Some interesting points made by columnist Adam Kirsch, writing in the Wall Street

Journal: According to a poll in July by the Cato Institute, 62% of Americans agreed with the statement, “The political climate these days prevents me from saying things I believe because others might find them offensive.” That included 77% of self-identified conservatives and 52% of Liberals. I would add to that, that people are not just concerned about offending others, they “know” they are talking to a wall. The other side is so strident in their views that civil discourse is impossible.

And, moving beyond electoral posturing, we have what can and can't be said – depends who's saying it. Mr. Kirsch points out that, Seattle Seahawks cornerback, Richard Sherman, who is black, told ESPN, “I stand by what I said that All lives matter and that we are all human beings.” That was received with much approval. This summer Sacramento Kings TV announcer Grant Napear, who is white, tweeted, “All lives matter, every single one.” He was fired.

According to Mr. Kirsch, the conflict, whether it be political or racially oriented gets amped up

when it comes to social media. He says, “What happens to free speech when instead of addressing 100 people we know, we’re talking to 40 million strangers we’ll never meet? Anyone who has ever engaged in a twitter debate or read an on-line comments section knows the answer. To stand out from the crowd and make people pay attention, one’s voice has to be louder, one’s views more extreme, because we’re talking to people who aren’t real to us- and may not be real at all, just bots- we speak far more aggressively than we would in life.”

Mr. Kirsch concludes, “To overcome our current divisions, Americans need to be confident enough to hear and express differences without giving in to fear or rage, which are mute emotions, capable of expressing themselves only in violence. Free speech represents the possibility that society can change peacefully, that today’s unpopular cause can become tomorrow’s consensus. The more urgently change is needed, the more that freedom is worth defending.”

CANCEL CULTURE, UK STYLE:

If some folks are unhappy about all the proposed name changes in D.C. (Used to be Washington, D.C.) you should see what's happening in England. Our side of the Atlantic has only been going about 400 years, but their side dates to William the Conqueror, and millennia before that if you want to go back to the Druids and Stonehenge. In a word, the English are extremely proud of their heritage and traditions.

No one would contend that England is still a colonial power, and there are certainly aspects of colonialism that were wrong, while, at the same time, there were aspects of colonialism that helped the citizenry of the countries that England colonized. As you can imagine, BLM's focus has spread across the Atlantic and there's really no European country to be spared.

Feeling the BLM heat, last week the BBC announced it would strip the lyrics from two popular patriotic songs, "Rule Britannia" and "Land of Hope and Glory." There was outrage throughout the country, and last Wednesday the BBC reversed itself.

I leave it for our readers to draw their own conclusion, but speaking for many of the English, Prime Minister Boris Johnson said, “It’s time we stopped our cringing embarrassment about our history, about our traditions and about our culture, and we stopped this general bout of self recrimination and wetness.”

BLM – HOW ABOUT A SUBSTANTIVE PROJECT?

An idea worth pursuing to make black lives better: There was a shocking, maddening, story in last week’s NY Times. A couple in Jacksonville, Fl. were in the process of trying to refinance their house. The wife is black and the husband is white. (a quick aside – now isn’t that silly- under the NY Times new guidelines, describing the wife as black requires a capital “B”. Describing the husband, he gets a lower case “w”; even Jesse Jackson disagrees.) The couple live in a predominately white neighborhood with homes selling between \$350,000 and \$550,000. The couple figured their house would appraise at about \$450,000. The appraiser came back with a value of \$330,000. Even their bank thought that was a

low valuation. An idea occurred to the couple- take out all the photographs of family members and anything else that might hint their's was a house occupied by blacks. They did just that and called for a new appraisal by, obviously, a different appraiser. Voila!! the new appraisal was 40% higher. The Times went on to describe another such incident. But, folks, you know this just has to be the tip of the iceberg. The refi market is huge during this time of very low rates and I suspect similar discrimination is rampant. So, BLM, take a few people off the statue and name change committee and put them on this.

COVID - 19 (CV) UPDATE:

Going into Labor Day weekend the U.S. was posting about 40,000 new cases a day, a major increase from just before Memorial Day when there were 22,000 cases per day on average. On the other hand, much improvement from late July when 70,000 new case per day were recorded. Many of the country's medical experts have expressed concern that 40,000 as a base level is worrisome as we get into colder

weather and will be eating and living more and more inside.

The rush of enthusiasm over plasma as a therapeutic breakthrough for those seriously ill with CV has been dampened as two senior FDA officials have been fired for overstating the efficacy of plasma therapy. Those treatments have not been discarded, but are being used with great caution until more thorough studies have been done.

Steroids, however, have become the therapeutic treatment of choice for critically ill CV sufferers and are linked to a one third reduction in death rates among those patients.

The columnist, Ross Douthat, writes that while the administration certainly had some missteps (like not mandating face masks), the U.S. doesn't look all that bad compared to other European countries. He points out, "Of the five most populous countries in Europe, only Germany has been a great success, with less than one fifth our CV death rate. Three of the remaining five, Spain, Italy and the UK have higher death rates than the U.S., and the

fourth, France, isn't that far below. Likewise, with the five largest countries in Latin America where only Argentina stands out as a clear success, Brazil and Peru have worse death rates than ours. Mexico is just below and Columbia is a little further down." Douthat isn't about to pin any gold medals on the Administration, but points out that if Operation Warp Speed succeeds in developing a good vaccine by late this fall, or early next year, it will shatter all records for the fastest development of a vaccine. Taken along with the U.S.'s competitive standing with regard to CV deaths in European and Latin American countries, Douthat notes that the situation is, "mixed and complicated, but not as decisively broken as today's headlines make it seem."

TONGUE THAID:

In Thailand you can't say the King's name in public, and actually, not in private either. Why? Because his name is King Maha Vajiralongkorn Bodindradebayavarangkun. Got that? There will be a quiz later.

Anyway, the King, of course, has a wife, queen

Suthida Vagiralongkorn Na Ayudhya (sorry for all the alphabet letter soup – but can't tell the players without a program. We'll just call her Na for short). Turns out that Na is wife number four, the previous three having been properly sent away. Sorry, no juicy Henry VIII stories.

So the king, let's call him Kingy, had married Na in 2019. Two months later he decided he would revive a position in the Royal court which had not existed since 1932 – the position of Royal Consort. The lucky recipient was Sineenat Wongvajirapakdi (we'll call her, Sin.) Sin had been an employee of the Royal handicraft store, but from her photograph, could also be a finalist in the Miss Universe contest. I'm sure Na was thrilled with Sin's selection. Kingy immediately made Sin a Major General in the military, and to display her military prowess she was photographed in the cockpit of a plane wearing a sports bra. In another photo she's shown holding an assault rifle – wow, what a leader! I'd follow her into a volcano.

Seems that Na didn't share my enthusiasm for Sin, as Sin was suddenly stripped of her titles,

Royal Consort and Major General, for having disrespected the Queen, and, apparently, relegated back to the gift shop peddling Kingy emblazoned tea cups.

Very recently, Kingy, apparently alarmed by his country's military unpreparedness, decided he must have his Major General back again. So much to Na's delight, Sin is back in the Royal Court as Royal Consort.

It is reported that one of Kingy's dogs also has military rank – probably Captain in charge of the K9 detachment.

Kingy has the benefit of Lese Majeste, meaning, if you don't like his behavior keep your mouth shut or you could wind up imprisoned for 15 years, that goes for Na too.

Turns out Kingy much prefers Europe where he spends much of the year. Na probably remains at home and Sin travels with Kingy. I wonder if she has other official duties.

Your faithful scribe, PB

