

We cannot afford another Antietam

Monday was the 150th anniversary of the bloodiest single-day battle in American history.

On Sept. 17, 1862, Union forces under Maj. Gen. George McClellan attacked Confederate Gen. Robert E. Lee along the Antietam Creek near Sharpsburg, Md. It was the first major battle in the Civil War.

The Confederate force, outnumbered nearly two to one, fought the Union Army to a standstill. Lee withdrew the next day and poor Union leadership allowed him to escape.

3,654 men were killed, with another 17,000 wounded, all of them Americans. The true tragedy is that the battle was tactically indecisive. Though the Union force was superior, McClellan failed to commit much of his army and ended up letting Lee escape, something that would plague Union commanders throughout the rest of the war. The only bright spot for the Union about the battle was that it ended Lee's invasion of Maryland.

Had McClellan pressed his advantage, he might have been able to destroy Lee's army and end the threat of the Confederacy's single greatest general. 20,000 men was a large price to pay with little to show for it.

Americans today are not used to those kinds of casualties in war. In the entirety of the Iraq War, 4,805 Americans were killed in eight years. Compare that to nearly 5,000 dead in three days at Gettysburg and 6,821 dead in 30 days on Iwo Jima.

Modern wars are different, and while the sacrifice of our soldiers, sailors, airmen and Marines is no less meaningful today, we should still take lessons from our past.

The United States has become increasingly divided in recent years. It is no longer the Blue and the Gray, but the Blue and the Red. We have become as bitterly separated over things like health care and Social Security as we were over slavery and state's rights 150 years ago.

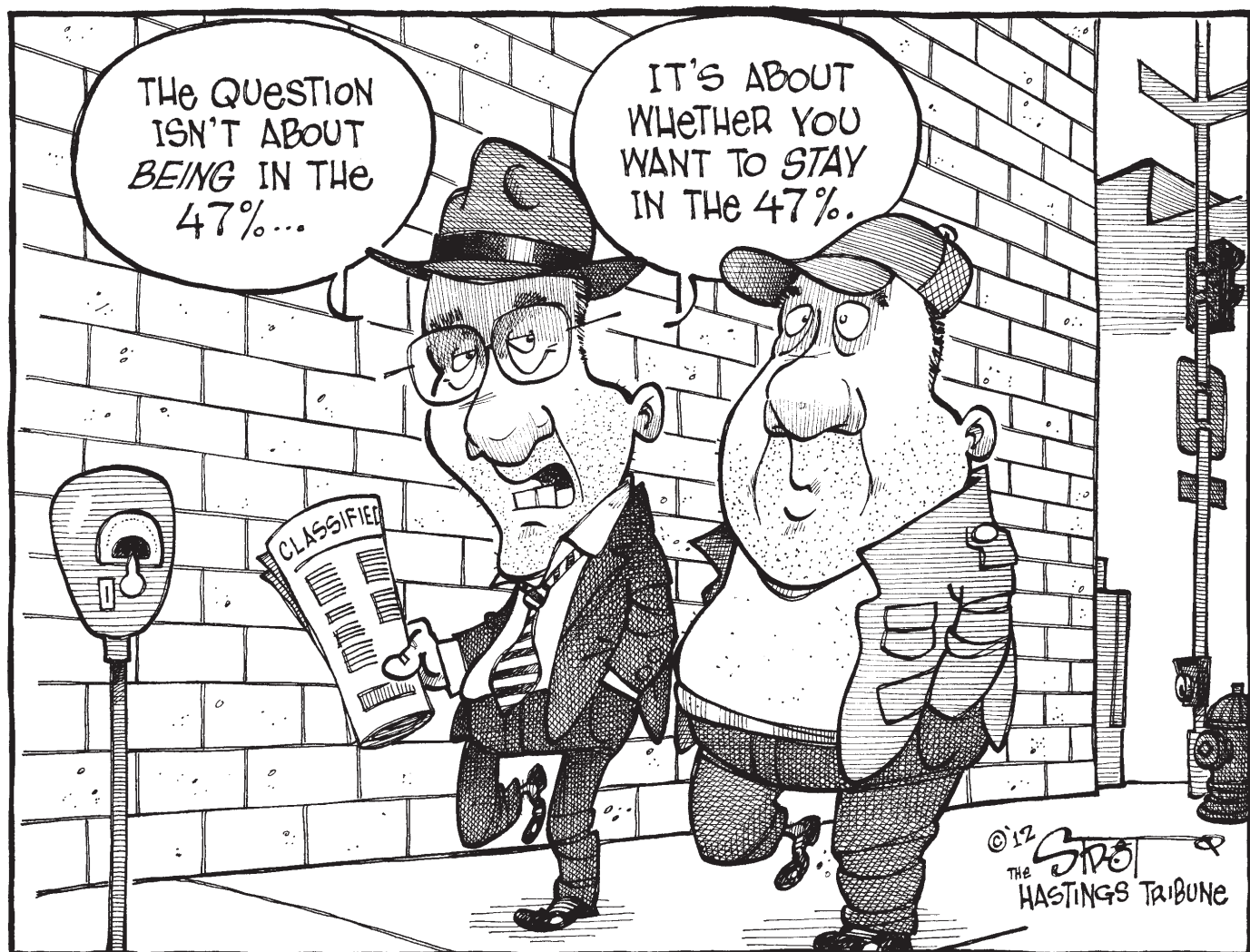
We simply cannot afford another Civil War. The last one cost more than half a million lives and completely destroyed the economy in the South.

What would a civil war look like today? Red States and Blue States are scattered around, and no state is completely homogenous between liberals and conservatives. There would be no Mason-Dixon line, no clear dividing line between opposing nations. It would truly result in a country going up in flames.

The bottom line would be that with advances in technology, another civil war would be utterly devastating. America nearly destroyed itself 150 years ago, and if brother fought against brother today, it would truly destroy itself.

We must remember that there is more that unites us as Americans than divides us, that despite our political differences, we must learn from our past and keep those differences in the realm of discourse, and not let it come to arms.

Simple tricks and nonsense
Kevin Bottrell



One's best laid plans for the future

During these last few weeks before we leave for Mexico, the intensity and anticipation start to build. When someone says they have some extra (whatever), and do I want to take it, my instinctive reply is, "Sure. We'll take it."

That also explains why I spot "good stuff" sitting on the curb. And why I'm not too ashamed to stop and ask if it would be OK for me to sort through it. That's how I found some perfectly good bedding. I'm always surprised at what people will throw away instead of give away.

We have a storage shed dedicated to storing "stuff to take to Mexico." It's to the point where you better stand back to open the door. It's about to explode from the pressure. Jim said, "Carolyn. Stop! We can't take anymore!"

Room. Schroom. What we can't take this trip will just be seed to grow "stuff" for the next trip.

-ob-

My tactics to integrate Henny Penny, our half-grown hen, into the adult flock seems to be working. Every day after feeding, I open her cage and the chicken coop door and let them all out into the yard. They were a little timid at first, not venturing far from the door. Soon, though, rooster, hens, and Henny Penny were scratching away. They seem to love the grass and weeds and especially the bugs.

The flock mostly ignores Henny.

Out Back
Carolyn Plotts



They're too busy feeding themselves. Except for one old hen. She seems to be Henny Penny's nemesis. She is the only one that still goes out of her way to harass and peck Henny.

I did tell Jim that we need to put an ID band on Henny's leg. As she gets bigger I won't be able to tell her from the others. I sure don't want to wring the wrong neck.

-ob-

Jim and I went to a fancy schmante party Saturday night. It was the Firemen's Ball and we got all "gussied up" for a night on the town. It's been a long time since we've been to that formal of an affair and I wanted to do it up right.

Don't ask me why, but I had a pair of false eyelashes in my vanity drawer and thought this might be the right occasion to bring them out. Years ago I didn't have any trouble putting on false eyelashes, but something's changed. Either my sight isn't as good as it used to be or my hands are shaking.

Bottom line: after several failed

attempts, I gave up. But not before my own eyelashes were glued together and the false ones were stuck to my fingers. My vamp days are over.

The party itself was great fun. We ate great food. Had great table conversation with some old and some new friends. Danced to some great old music. Helped raise some money for a great cause. It was a totally great evening all the way around. I think a great new tradition has been born.

-ob

Do you feel that snap in the air? Fall is here. My favorite time of year.

This is a good time to do some tree work. Not only trimming and transplanting, but eliminating too. Jim is committed to cutting down a locust tree in front of our house. It's nasty thorns have always been a nuisance. We'll replace it with something nicer, but I will sure miss its shade next summer; and for several summers after that.

-ob

I try not to talk much politics. It was a subject, however, my mother seemed to enjoy. In August of 1942 she wrote about having rats in the granary. She went on to say, "We've been wondering what drew the rats to Washington. But then, though rats like corn, they also like their "chickens" and from what we hear Washington is lousy with them." I think I'll just leave it at that.

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Proponents of organic, labor-intensive farming contend we should go back to the days when every family owned 40 acres, farmed with hay burners (horses) and applied no chemicals.

You remember the good ol' days when people were self-sufficient, owned a couple milk cows, tilled a garden and butchered 40 or 50 fryers each spring.

Some of these zealots propose each nation should also strive for self sufficiency. No imports. No exports.

Should such events occur, you may want to prepare yourself for milking each morning instead of that piping hot mug of coffee. Forget about sliced bananas on your bowl of corn flakes. These goodies we import into this country, and a lot more, won't be on the kitchen table any more. Count on it.

God forbid we adopt these policies. If we cave in to those who spread hysteria about unsafe food and giant farms, be prepared to do without the services of all the non-agricultural types. This includes carpenters, painters, nurses, doctors, teachers, writers and musicians.

In case you haven't heard, labor-intensive farming doesn't permit time for many other pursuits. Neither does production agriculture.

Insight
John Schlageck



Farmers run non-stop, from early morning to late at night, planting and harvesting crops, tilling the soil, feeding and caring for livestock. Their work seldom ends. It's foolish to assume everyone would want to leave his or her job in the city to move to the farm. It ain't all "Green Acres" out there folks.

And who's to say all these people from other professions would become productive farmers?

A friend of mine who lives in Denver remarked to me when we were visiting last weekend that he does not want to be a farmer. He says he couldn't feed himself, much less the rest of the country or world.

"I'd starve to death and so would the rest of us," he told me. "If you want to till the soil, go for it. But that doesn't mean the rest of us want to, thank you."

If we return to a system where

everyone farms, brace yourself for even more uncertain economic times. Manual labor and animal power could spell the return of food shortages and famine. A nation of farmers translates to a nation even more vulnerable to depressions and hunger. A drought, plague of insects or disease could trigger such tragedies because we'd have no chemicals to fight them with.

Today's mechanized farmer provides us with the safest, most abundant food in the world. He works closely with crop consultants when applying herbicides, insecticides and fertilizers. He has cut his uses significantly in recent years - up to 50 percent in some cases.

Farmers work years to leave a legacy of beneficial soil practices. Most of the farmers I know would give up farming rather than ruin their land. They are proud of the crops they grow and the land they work.

Farmers continue to work to conserve water, plug abandoned wells, watch their grassland grazing and continue to adopt sound techniques that will ensure preservation of the land.

There's an old saying that rings true today: "You can never go home." Yes, we can never return to the good ol' days. Besides, were they really all that good?