

# CHOWAN HERALD

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## Thought of the week

"You build on failure. You use it as a stepping-stone. Close the door on the past. You don't try to forget the mistakes, but you don't dwell on it. You don't let it have any of your energy, or any of your time, or any of your space."

— Johnny Cash

## WWI, and second Fall of Man

On June 28, 1914, a Bosnian-Serb student named Gavrilo Princip killed Austrian archduke Franz Ferdinand and his wife, the duchess. It was the shot-heard-round-the-world, unleashing a series of events that by August 1914 embroiled Europe in war. That deadly summer unfolded 100 years ago, and the world truly was never the same.

Civilization was soon engaged in a horrific conflict marred by mechanized warfare previously unimaginable: tanks, subs, battleships, air power, machine guns with names like "the Devil's paint brush," and legions of poison gas—the largest-scale use of chemical weapons in history. Winding through all the agony were rotten, death-strewn trenches, an incomprehensible maze of thousands of miles of freezing, disease-ridden, and rat-infested tunnels where men subsisted below the earth. They rose from this hell only to be fed into a worse one—no man's land, a dénouement with the human meat-grinder.

It was World War I, the "Great War." Ever since, professors have struggled to explain to students how the major powers became engulfed by this nightmare. I start my lectures on WWI with an hour on its causes. These ranged from colonial and tariff disputes to a complicated network of alliances that inexorably committed various countries to battle, beginning with Austria-Hungary, Serbia, Germany, and Russia.

Still, as I cover these causes with my students, they are confused, frustrated, unsatisfied. Where was the Pearl Harbor? Where were the concentration camps? Where was the Hitler-Stalin Pact? Who was the brutal dictator?

There was none. No such blatant evils precipitated this war.

It was a disastrously wasteful affair that Pope Benedict XV publicly declared an unjust war, a mad form of collective European suicide. The pontiff rightly judged that there were no salient moral issues dividing the combatants. These countries should not have been at war, let alone slaughtering their boys by the millions.

The moral calamity was obvious to all. Quite apart from the bishop of Rome, the acclaimed atheist-leftist intellectual Sidney Hook might have best summed up the catastrophe when he referred to World War I not as the "Great War," or "War to End All Wars," or the "Kaiser's War," or, in President Woodrow Wilson's famous line, the war to "make the world safe for democracy," but as something considerably less inspiring: World War I was, said Hook mordantly, "the second fall of man."

And so it was. Religious metaphor best captures the gravity of this giant fall from grace. Historian Michael Hull evokes the image of O Cristo das Trincheiras, "The Christ of the Trenches." This life-size statue of Jesus Christ hung with arms outstretched on a tall wooden cross was erected on the Western Front. Soiled, bullet-scarred, and, most of all, crucified, the French presented it to the government of Portugal after the war to memorialize the thousands of Portuguese who sacrificed themselves at the Battle of Flanders. It's an appropriate symbol for the millions who gave their lives for this colossal sin.

Michael Hull maintains that World War I was, in a perverse way, arguably more horrible than World War II. How so? "The horrors of World War I," writes Hull, "exceeded those of World War II in terms of the sheer futility of squandered lives."

More over, the horror didn't end. It simply got more horror.

Here's what the modern world should know about World War I: This wretched war, whose reasons still baffle, enabled Hitler in Germany and the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia. It helped lead to World War II and the Cold War. The famous British historian A.J.P. Taylor put it plainly, "The first war explains the second and, in fact, caused it, in so far as one event causes another."

The bloody disaster would be a mere warm-up, the first of two worldwide wars, fostered by the "punitive peace" imposed upon the surrendering Germans at the unforgiving hands of the French and other Allied leaders at the Versailles Conference. That punishing peace did not produce a peaceful heart among the Germans, many of which mistakenly believed they had won the war and surrendered only to agree to acceptable conditions of peace. Instead, the conditions at Versailles helped sow the seeds



## Striving to tell the whole truth

Tim Brabble, a candidate for sheriff of Chowan County, posted on Facebook last week that the child victim in the rape case he is speaking a great deal about in his campaign is not Hispanic.

"The confessing child rapist is Hispanic, the child is not," according to the Facebook post. As always, of course, the Chowan Herald is glad to correct errors of fact.

So if the victim is not Hispanic, we are glad to help clear up that misconception.

Let me add that I hope Brabble is equally willing to correct errors on his Facebook page.

"I want to set the record straight from this week's newspaper article," the post reads, referring to an article on the front page of the Chowan Herald last week.

Far from setting the record straight, however, the post does just the opposite, further confusing the record and raising questions about my reporting on this election in a way that raises questions about my integrity.

I hate being in this position. But as tempting as it is to ignore this Facebook posting in order to avoid appearing defensive, I believe I need to defend my integrity as a reporter and editor.

There is a difference – and it's an enormous one, not simply a hairsplitting matter of semantics – between saying "I don't recall saying that" or "the reporter must have misunderstood what I said" and saying what Brabble in fact posted: "I did not give that information to the interviewer and it is untrue."

"That information" refers to the statement, attributed to Brabble in the newspaper article, that the child victim in the rape case was Hispanic.

Again, if the child is not Hispanic that is something the newspaper is glad to clear up.

The problem I have is with Brabble's claim that he did not give the information to the interviewer.

I was the interviewer. I talked to him on the sidewalk outside the Chowan County Board of Elections Office right after he filled out his paperwork to run unaffiliated in the sheriff's race in November.

I do not – repeat, do not – believe Brabble is lying. I have not seen anything in my conversations with him that would lead me to question his character in that way.

What I do believe and assert is that, to the best of my understanding, he is mistaken. I don't think he's mistaken about the ethnicity of the child. Rather, I believe he is mistaken about what he told me.

I will assume, until given a reason to do otherwise, that his inaccuracy is the result of an honest mistake rather than an

intentional misrepresentation.

People misrepresent all the time. I do it myself. Often I don't realize what I have said until someone points it out.

A couple of years ago I was talking to Pasquotank County Commissioner Gary White about College of The Albemarle when I slipped and referred to the college as "VGCC," a mistake born of my eight years as a reporter where the community college is Vance-Granville Community College.

"VGCC?" White responded with a raised eyebrow.

It was then, and only then, that I realized my mistake.

Unfortunately, I could cite multiple other examples of this kind of thing from my own life. But you get the idea.

Even worse, though, I have on occasion made that same kind of mistake in print. I once referred in print to Albemarle Hospital in Elizabeth City as "Maria Parham Hospital" – another case of the eight-years-in-Henderson syndrome.

We all make mistakes.

Let me say, too, that I have on occasion heard things wrong, and that confusion has in a very few instances led to my reporting something incorrectly. I have been glad to correct those things when that has happened.

In this case, though, I am confident that did not happen.

The candidate looked me right in the eye – and I was looking directly at him and listening intently – and used the phrase "poor Hispanic child." That is my best recollection and is what I recorded in my notes at the time.

But while I stand by my report, I won't insist that I could not have misheard what the candidate said.

What I will insist on, however, is that my report was based directly on the interview with Brabble. I am not especially familiar with the case in question and do not know any of the parties. I had no reason to speculate about the ethnicity of the child or make anything up.

And that's the heart of the matter for me: I don't make things up. That is beyond the pale for a reporter. Facts are our currency.

As a reporter, editor and person, my integrity is of the utmost importance to me.

Please understand I don't question Brabble's honesty or integrity. Like me, he is a man of faith and someone who has strived to live out the Christian faith in his profession.

I respect him as a person and as a law enforcement officer.

What I do question is the inclination to make serious allegations on the basis of conjecture.

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## Are we doomed to polarization?

We Americans are trapped in a political dilemma. We all like representative democracy, but we don't much like the way it's performing.

The reason for this dissatisfaction is clear. Polls in recent years detail a polarized nation, divided both ideologically and politically. This is, as the Pew Research Center put it recently, "a defining feature of politics today." In the public's eye, Washington gets most of the blame for this.

Yet Congress and the political world around it reflect the rest of the country more than we'd like to believe. Our nation is divided ideologically. It's also segregated politically, with many Americans preferring to associate with and live near people who share their views; gerrymandered districts and closed primaries intensify the effect. Our media is more partisan than it used to be. Interest groups – many of them funded by ordinary Americans who want their voices magnified – are more engaged than they were a generation ago. And though we deplore negative politics, we respond to it and even encourage our favorite partisans to engage in it.

Anyone who becomes President today does so with nearly half the country opposed to him the day he takes office. Moreover, we face a long list of issues where decisive action may be impossible: abortion, gun control, climate change, a host of budgetary and economic problems, the death penalty, tax reform, immigration, drug laws. These issues don't just divide Congress; they divide the nation, with no clear path forward.

Our admired political system, in other words, is not working well. In Pew's survey, the extremes make up just over a third of the American public, but because they're disproportionately active they drive our politics. The larger, more diverse center can't agree on a direction for the country, but its members are united by their distaste for the tone of politics and the unwillingness of politicians to compromise and break the stalemate. We are not getting the politics we want.

So how do we resolve our dilemma?

There are many procedural steps that can ease the gridlock on Capitol Hill. Among them, the House and Senate could schedule themselves so that they're in session at the same time. Congressional leaders and the President ought to meet

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at least once a month. Congress needs to work the same five-day week that the rest of us do, and reduce its centralized leadership by empowering committees. Open primaries would help moderate the nation's politics, as would bipartisan redistricting commissions capable of doing away with gerrymandered districts. Increasing voter participation and improving the integrity of our elections would also help. Limiting the Senate filibuster and allowing minority parties in both chambers more of an opportunity to offer amendments, would open up debate and forestall endless stalemates.

But resolving our dilemma is unlikely to happen quickly. It's hard to see either side in this partisan divide winning or losing decisively in the elections immediately ahead. Even if one party wins both houses in Congress, it's not easy to move when the White House is in the control of another party. With the need for 60 votes in the Senate, the minority party can always find ways to slow things down.

Still, it's worth remembering that American politics is dynamic, not static. Change occurs, sometimes quickly, but more often slowly. We won't forever be this evenly divided, because public opinion will eventually evolve and the system will respond.

Which raises my final point. Even when our frustration with division and discord spills over into impatience with the system itself, our obligations as American citizens remain the same. We face complex problems that don't have simple solutions. They demand a willingness to exercise the values of representative democracy: tolerance, mutual respect, accepting ideological differences, working to build consensus.

Our core values accept that the differences in opinions among us will continue, but also compel us to find a way through them so the country can move forward. By accepting the challenges that come with living in a representative democracy and renewing our confidence in it, we can lay the groundwork for change. In the end, we created our political dilemma and are responsible for working our way through it.

Lee Hamilton is director of the Center on Congress at Indiana University. He was a member of the U.S. House of Representatives for 34 years.