

## No Mud, No Lotus Talk, by Tony Ierulli, 5/16/21

It's been a rough year for our country and the world, which explains why our discussion was a mix of pain and optimism. It made me think of birth after a long labor and how *something good* is coming. This idea fits with our title – “No Mud, No Lotus”. According to Town & Country: [“...the lotus has a life cycle unlike any other plant. With its roots latched in mud, it submerges every night into river water and ... re-blooms the next morning, sparkling clean.”](#) So, what is the mud we are in now? What struggle are we going through? And what, if anything, is that “something good” I hope is about to bloom?

### The Mud

To me, the mud is a mindset that has persisted in our country since its inception. Some believe we are a Judeo/Christian nation where white, European culture is the ultimate in human achievement that justifies a white privilege many of us enjoy. Part of this muck is an individualistic, self-interested, wild-west mentality where people should go it alone. No government is good government, and some [invisible hand of the marketplace](#) will guide us.

This self-interest continues to push the use of fossil fuels on a path to destruction. This is not surprising since the western attitude is to tame nature and exploit it for profit. It's this mindset that led a friend of mine to look at a tree and say “that's gotta be 20 cord”. He saw a big, beautiful tree as firewood to be sold by the truckload.

Instead of fertile soil, this mindset feels like the matted wet leaves from the previous fall preventing new ideas from sprouting and competing with the status quo of the canopy above.

### The Struggle

We've seen and heard of the pain inflicted by this old world view whenever our country tries to re-bloom. The past year was very painful with a clueless administration allowing so many to die. This coming on the heels of draconian policies of the previous years. White supremacy has always held “the others” back through redlining, housing, job, or education discrimination. Police violence and general practices descend directly from the days of [slave patrols](#) terrorizing runaway slaves.

Of course, it's not just the “others” that struggle in this country. All poor people are hurt by our winner-take-all economy that looks like it was designed to insure inequality. I often wonder if the boom-and-bust cycle is intentional since those at the top are seldom hurt, but those in the middle and bottom often need to start all over again with each downturn. This past year highlights this disparity where [billionaires saw their net worth increase by half a trillion dollars](#) while almost everyone else got screwed.

Of course, our country has always had some form of these injustices. But it seems like recently there is a *huge backlash* to progressive gains. Racists are more open about who they are, which may be good so we can see it and do something about it. This overt racism claims that Native Americans, and all minorities, have nothing to contribute to American culture. According to one former Pennsylvania senator: [“We came here and ... We birthed a nation from nothing. I mean, there was nothing here. I mean, yes we have Native Americans but candidly there isn't much Native American culture in American culture,”](#)

We saw neo-Nazis and Klan members marching with Tiki-Torches and militias are coming out of the woodwork to “defend” our way of life. I think we know who is included in “our” way of life. And talk about white privilege! They thought they could storm our capital with no repercussions?! Politicians flout norms of behavior like when someone yelled “you lie!” during Obama's a state of the union address.

And Obama was denied his right to appoint a supreme-court judge in a gamble that paid off for the next president.

Anti-science sentiment was used to do nothing about COVID 19 or climate change. Not to mention all the total nut-job conspiracy theories including the one about Jewish space lasers causing forest fires? All the gas-lighting about election fraud then *literally* trying to overturn the most secure election in our history! Gerrymandering has become more blatant and states *even admit* to tilting the playing field with racist election laws! As reported on NBC News, “[... Arizona ... offered a blunt reason for ... defending ... voting restrictions before the Supreme Court ... The measures disadvantage Democrats.](#)”

As bad as it, this backlash to progress *may actually be a hopeful sign*. To me, these actions are the final death throes of a dying world view trying desperately to cling to power.

## The Flower

In spite of all the muck, we see the shoots of new growth pushing up through the leaves and out of the river bottom.

We saw record setting voter turnout and mobilization of minority voters during a pandemic and long lines at voting booths! Our new administration shows how government *can work* with a successful vaccine roll-out and the passage of an economic rescue plan. We have the most diverse congress and administration in history. I personally see a diverse workforce with women and minorities in hi-level managerial positions at the EPA. Major League Baseball pulling out of Atlanta and large corporations rejecting voter suppression laws gives me hope.

One silver lining of the past year is cleaner air since working from home stopped people driving to work. People noticed the difference and want to keep it this way! Neighborhoods in NYC want to keep pedestrian zones that were setup for outside dining during the pandemic. And there is an urgent push for affordable alternative, renewable fuels that, hopefully, will provide much needed jobs. Auto makers are finally developing electric cars, with some committing to all electric vehicles in the future!

And remember the Tiki Torch march and that guy with the scowling face? He was kicked out of military for participating in that march. The conviction of Officer Chauvin (who really gave Chauvinists a bad name) is a step in the right direction. And according to CNN, “[Federal prosecutors are moving forward with plans to charge ... Chauvin and three other ... police officers with federal civil rights violations...](#)”.

Confederate flags are coming down and are even banned at NASCAR events! More diverse support for Black Lives Matter and LGBTQ rights movements, police reform, voting rights, and economic fairness is on the rise. And today's youth are politically and environmentally enlightened, *and acting on their concerns*. A key to this progress, in my mind, is the trend towards demographic parity. According to a 2018 Brookings Institute study, “[... statistics project that the nation will become “minority white” in 2045.](#)” A more recent study in 2020 says that our population is [diversifying faster than predicted](#), especially among the youth! Maybe demographic parity will happen sooner than 2045? As far as I'm concerned, it can't come soon enough.

## Conclusion

So, that's my sense (or 2 cents?) of where our country is coming from and where I hope we are going. When demographic parity comes, and if we play our cards right, we could be a better model of how different people can live together in this world. Two women sitting behind the president at the state of the union *must* be a sign of a more diverse and egalitarian flower pushing its way up into the world.