

## National pride restored despite election results



**Connor Stangler**

On election night, you would have found me cursing fate, cursing myself, crying on a few shoulders, fearing the future, pleading with fate, and, above all, cursing this country. But after cursing, cursing, crying, fearing, pleading and, above all, cursing, I was something I didn't expect to be: happy.

I was happy because I knew the newly elected Republicans, after taking their country back, would eventually need to give specifics on their plan to cut spending or really do anything. In the process, they would

have to reveal to the public that they never really had any plan except that they knew how to market themselves with empty but exciting rhetoric.

Don't get me wrong, I was and still am happy about that. What really left me dumbstruck, what really filled me with an incomparable joy, was my wonder at the American system of government. In spite of all the apparent evil that had just taken place, this country and its citizens proved once again that they had the capability to do it. That is why, on election night, my belief in American exceptionalism was renewed.

If America is exceptional, that must mean she is atypical and thus not subject to traditional standards or principles. I hope you would agree that this is an extremely arrogant conclusion, and one I wholeheartedly oppose. In certain circles, American exceptionalism is a four-letter word. It implies hubris, stupidity and a lack of cultural awareness. Carried to its various ends, American exceptionalism certainly

can include all of those things. But I subscribe to a different kind, one that is based not on comparison but rather on a basic amazement.

I'll admit I love this country. No amount of rashness or shortsightedness on the part of the American citizenry could make me think otherwise. But I am not a blind patriot. I recognize that America has engaged in genocide, overstepped its boundaries, ignored international law and concocted flimsy excuses for both. Just as a careless, self-centered and successful son comes home to a father who can't help exclaiming with love and pride, "My son really is exceptional!" I am quick to marvel at our accomplishments.

Our country endures many of the same problems the old, great empires faced: rampant corruption, foreign threats, etc. Many of the most disturbing problems we face are rooted in human nature. I take solace in the fact that our country was created with the perils of human

nature in mind. Madison, Jefferson, Hamilton and the rest of the Founding Fathers had every history lesson at their disposal, and you can be sure that they were aware of most of them. Their various treatises on factions and competing interests within a political system reveal that they knew Americans would succumb to corruption and greed. So they formed a government that was slow enough and inefficient enough to be able to ensure deliberation among factions.

We are sensitive to political sin because we expect better. America was an experiment and still is. Journalist Michael Kinsley wrote of his American wariness in a Nov. 2 Politico.com column: "Democracy requires me to respect the results of the elections. It doesn't require me to agree with them or to admire the process by which voters made up their minds."

Since the election of 1800, America has never experienced a violent transfer of power between two parties. With a past like this —

void of despotism, autocrat-approved assassination of government officials or periods of militant control (we may finally have that on our hands) — American democracy deserves our respect, not a slavish respect but a discriminating one.

Is America immune to the typical hazards of an empire? Or is the swift but patient hand of history biding its time until it can prove, once again, that we are slaves to it, no different from the rest? We need to fix parts of the system. We can curb government corruption and mend a broken Senate. But I believe in the idea of America. Established on Enlightenment ideals like the power of the individual and of reason, our government is capable of so much. It's okay to be proud of this American creation. Besides, you're part of it.

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### AROUND THE QUAD

#### Do you shop at Walmart?



"Yes, if I didn't I would have to go to many different stores to get what I need."

**Brad Dyer senior**



"Yes, I shop at Walmart because it is cheap."

**David Merrifield senior**



"I only shop there when I can't find what I need at other stores like HyVee."

**Sara Clark senior**



"Yes, Walmart has everything I need, but I don't buy produce from there."

**Emily Hall senior**

## Wal-Mart damages all aspects of society



**Zach Vicars**

During his keynote speech at the Local Foods dinner Oct. 28, Will Ercker, Truman graduate and authority on local foods, instructed listeners to "completely avoid Walmart's doors." At the time, I thought Ercker's statement was a little over-the-top. However, after some investigating, I realize that avoiding Walmart may be the only ethical option I have.

It's easy to be fooled by Wal-Mart's aggressive advertisement campaign — moving testimonies from thrifty soccer moms are just about enough to convince anyone of the wholesome nature of a corporation. However, from the top-down, Wal-Mart is a corporation built on deception and greed.

For example, Wal-Mart is currently setting a record: The largest class-action suit in history will be filed against it. In the coming months or years, Wal-Mart will have to stand trial before the Supreme Court and one million female employees who are suing the corporation for gender discrimination.

A 2004 court report of a case against a Walmart in California "showed statistically significant gender-based disparities in all in-store job classifications in all 41 Wal-Mart regions." Across the board, men were reportedly paid 5 to 15 percent more for the same work as women, according to the report. Furthermore, while approximately 65 percent of Wal-Mart employees are female, according to an April 26 New York Times report, only 33 percent of Wal-Mart management positions are held by women. These alarming discrepancies do not happen by accident but rather by the nature of some antiquated philosophy of leadership and subordination.

I'm not going to say that Walmart's corporate culture is evil. The fact that Wal-Mart CEO Michael Duke makes more money before his lunch break than his average employee makes in a year (abcnews.com) doesn't make him evil. It simply makes him a businessman. Wal-Mart did not invent the technique of exploiting its workers and hypnotizing its customers, but it has nearly perfected it at a corporate level.

But Wal-Mart doesn't just do damage at a corporate level — in fact, the effect it has at the local level is probably worse. Take a second to imagine all the departments in our local Walmart: groceries, clothing, home-furnishings, sporting goods, technology, home and garden, pharmacy, etc.

Each of these departments represents a potential business that would have had a proprietor, an accountant, an insurance agent and employees — all of these folks would have lived and shopped locally. But thanks to Walmart's unstoppable wave of competition, such businesses will never be.

When a Walmart's addition of a SuperCuts closes down a local barber, the old maxim, "If you can't beat them, join them," seems like the perfect remedy. However, these pragmatists have probably never owned their own business, and they certainly underestimate the cultural importance of the sole-proprietorship.

Local businesses bring us back to the American ideal of consumers being involved and connected with their purchases. As Americans, we might never again be able to trade beaver furs for a sack of flour, but we can certainly enjoy the smile on our neighbors' faces when we purchase a pound of their tomatoes. Local Walmart stores don't want to see us return to that sort of producer/consumer dependency.

But local businesses do more than just perpetuate a traditional American idea. The economic data affirms that they are essential to our economy. According to DailyFinance.com, "68 percent of the money spent in local stores returns to the area as taxes, payroll and other expenses. Chain stores, on the other hand, keep an average of just 43 percent." It's clear that Walmart damages both the cultural and practical levels of our local economy.

It's fashionable among college students to cast Wal-Mart in a negative light. All across this country, students boycott and speak out against that nefarious, yellow smiley face. At Truman, however, students have fallen into the superpower's snare of convenience. Our pocketbooks, sadly, outweigh our conscience. For too long we have chosen low prices at any cost. Our ethics must not be for sale. I also urge you to "completely avoid Walmart's doors."

*Zach Vicars is a junior philosophy/religion and linguistics major from St. Charles, Mo.*

## Nuclear power should not be a solution



**Tyler Retherford**

Sunday, while many of us were enjoying an extra hour of sleep, protesters in Germany attempted to block trains bringing nuclear waste into the country. The protesters were responding to a recent decision by the German government to not only continue the storing of nuclear waste in the country but also to extend the life spans of its 17 nuclear plants by 12 years, which were previously due to be decommissioned in 2020. The disparity between this image and the push by some conservatives in the United States to paint nuclear power as a progressive energy solution is particularly jarring.

Nuclear power is, at surface level, rather seductive. It doesn't involve any sort of ugly, photographable pollution like the billowing clouds of smoke from coal plants, which gives the image of being environmentally friendly. It doesn't bring with it the issue of dwindling fuel supplies like oil. And, of course, nuclear anything always has the tinge of futurism to it. Beyond these images, though, lies the often ignored danger — the longevity of the waste.

The arrogance required to utilize nuclear waste is nearly unimaginable. Dumping other forms of waste might have repercussions for decades, but nuclear waste would be a danger for generations. Generating more and deciding where to dump it will have ramifications for a longer time than most power plants will even be in operation.

The regions where waste is being dumped might be unpopulated now, but the decision to store nuclear waste there is, in effect, deciding for future generations that the land is uninhabitable. Even dams, one of the most dramatically landscape-altering forms of power-generation, can be destroyed in order to revert the changes. The effects of nuclear waste last practically forever, and that kind of power shouldn't be an option for the ever-changing political structure of our country.

The problem is that the hazards of nuclear power aren't visual. We're all used to seeing the images of dirty coal plants and oil spills, so it's difficult to forget their negative impacts, no matter how hard "clean coal" might try. Nuclear power doesn't have that stigma, aside from a few rare accidents. However, sustainable doesn't just mean no clouds of smoke. It means no harmful buildup of waste at all. Nuclear power simply isn't sustainable. Because the technology already is developed to support it, and it fits the existing model of power production in America, it's not hard to see why it's an easy cop-out in the pursuit of truly sustainable energy. Its proponents can avoid making any

structural changes and still avoid the negative image of traditional power.

However, this kind of duplicity is not only deplorable and cowardly, it's dangerous. This refusal to take sides in a hotly contested issue and instead try to please both sides not only doesn't solve the problem but can have serious negative ramifications for generations. Putting those kinds of repercussions on others just for temporary political points is the height of irresponsibility.

Given that people in Germany are literally lying down in front of trains to stop the continuation of their nuclear program, we shouldn't be looking at nuclear power as the solution to our energy dilemma. Nuclear waste is not a mistake easily rectified, and consequently not something viable for experimentation. We should instead be looking at how it's been implemented elsewhere and how it's fared there. If these protests are any indication, we're better off staying the course with solar and wind power. Regardless of your political leanings, it's important to look at the long-term ramifications of our political decisions. Pandering to fleeting partisan battles shouldn't cause future generations to have to deal with serious, dangerous consequences.

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## Election results determined by fear, not sanity



**John Hitzel**

If you need more reason to fear the power of modern American media, the midterm elections are as much proof as you need.

I attended a satellite meeting of Jon Stewart and Stephen Colbert's Rally to Restore Sanity and/or Fear two weekends ago. At the end of the rally, Stewart gave a speech attacking the function of cable journalism.

"The country's 24-hour politico-pundit-perpetual-panic-conflictinator did not cause our problems," Stewart said. "But its existence makes solving them that much harder."

I thought the rally was less a call to action and more of a call to reflection through satire — reflection

about who Americans are versus who our media portrays us to be. Stewart confirmed my suspicion.

"The image of Americans that is reflected back to us by our political and media process is false," he said.

We are not so easily divided and pigeonholed. People with different viewpoints and different backgrounds help each other out all the time, except, apparently, in Washington or on the news.

News outlets feel the need to create easily digestible and super-zazzy spectacles, dire situations of only surface-level depth, in order to keep the news accessible and exciting. Boring television equals low ratings, which means lower advertising revenue. Slow news days do not exist in the world of 24-hour news, so when there's no news, you just point the camera at anything. The best way to keep people tuning in is to manufacture threats that you did not know existed.

Fear gets ratings. And these last few months, programming was paid for in political attack ads.

I remember right after the attacks

of September 11, one of cable news' favorite stories explored how to protect yourself from biological warfare. They recommended plastic wrapping your house or creating a safe room to wait it out. The movie "Panic Room," starring Jodie Foster, materialized shortly thereafter.

After this story came another dire situation in which Home Depots across the nation ran out of duct tape and weatherproofing plastic. I recall the story of a man who had plastic-wrapped his entire house a few times over. Then came the stories about flag pins, deeming people who didn't wear them as un-American. After that we saw all those gaudy, patriotic ribbon-magnets on cars.

I mention these anecdotes as examples of irrational fears planted by the media which then take root in the real world. The media focused on something that didn't exist (a biological attack) and made it a legitimate enough fear to motivate people to act irrationally (plastic wrapping one's house), albeit in a sane and rational cause (protecting one's family). After that, it was the Asian bird flu scare (which

never hit America, but could have), then swine flu (a few isolated cases, but nothing resembling the pandemic it was hyped as) and now Muslims and mosques, which is simply race-baiting and religious intolerance.

The election results are the product of irrational fears being cultivated in the collective imagination of the American public. Which is too bad, because politics need to be rational. Otherwise, who knows what craziness will be made into law? I believe the Founding Fathers expected us to be stupid, but not to be insane.

All those little Hitler moustaches drawn on Obama posters, the Glenn Beck's crying, "Socialism," ads implying "We're gonna be slaves to the Chinese" and protest signs saying "Keep the Government Outta My Medicaid" caused people to vote based on fears of things that weren't real, rational or even physically possible, this returned power to the very hucksters who caused most of the major immediate problems keeping America broken today.

In this election, people were angry at both major parties, and they had

every reason to be. But the reason the Democrats got a dose of reality handed to them was because the Republicans and their supporters simply had more money and a simpler platform to throw at the media than the Democrats: fear. They saturated the airwaves with attack ads and didn't have to demonstrate why they were better.

Great job, America. Fear is still very much alive, and as long as the news media continues to foster it, we will all suffer from information loss and grand delusions of boogeymen. As Jon Stewart phrased it at his rally, "The press is our immune system. If it overreacts to everything, we actually get sicker." Deep stuff coming from a comedian. Rational people can slough off these two-day scares, but as the election results and ratings of the 24-hour fear-fests have demonstrated, we would rather be afraid than in touch with reality.

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