

DEDICATED TO THE PROMOTION OF TOWNS COUNTY

# OPINIONS & COMMENTARY

## A Fair Witness

On the 7th of November, I was having lunch with a good friend who lives a few miles south of here.

We settled into a friendly little mercado—one of those charming community-based stores that combine a small café with a market offering fresh meat, produce and everyday essentials. They remind me of the local markets and “general stores” that have all but vanished from mainstream America, leaving behind a yearning for that personal touch and connection to the community.

At the table next to us, a group of five men was also having lunch. A crew truck was parked outside, and all the guys wore company uniforms. Four of the men were Latino, and one was Caucasian, and though they were laughing and talking quietly, we were close enough to overhear their conversation. They were all Trump supporters, and they were happy.

In our travels from the mountains to the foothills that week and excluding a few notable exceptions, the mood of the people we encountered was generally upbeat and hopeful. In the grocery store, strangers struck up conversations with each other. People were being nice to the cashiers.

Only a few hours away from the mercado, the mood was decidedly grim among another group we visited. Some were still shocked and disbelieving. How could this have happened? What’s wrong with America? All the stages of grief were in evidence, but with anger was getting the most play.

For the most part, we just listened and nodded. “If everything you say is true, I’d have to agree with you. Let’s not talk about politics right now. Is that my phone? I really need to take this call.”

Between elections, when emotions are not running so high and people are less sensitive, they will sometimes share the thought processes that led them to support a certain party or candidate. Why did you support them? What information did you use to form that opinion? Where did you get the information?

I’m still astonished at how narrow the window can be through which partisans view the world, and how thoroughly the distinction between fact and interpretation has been clouded by the masters of narrative. Even though trust in news organizations is at historic lows, partisans rarely question their sources when the information given agrees with their preconceived notions.

In the classic Robert Heinlein novel, “Stranger in a Strange Land,” a futuristic society suffers from a scarcity of truth. As a remedy, it has developed the “Fair Witness,” which is human trained and conditioned to observe and report events with perfect accuracy and impartiality. In their official capacity, Fair Witnesses are used in legal proceedings, scientific inquiries, and contractual procedures.

“Stranger” was written in 1961 when American society was embarking on a period of unrest and turmoil as traditional values were being challenged. The Cold War was heating up; rapid technological change driven by the Space Race was unleashing creative destruction, and the specter of nuclear annihilation haunted anyone who had ever done a “duck and cover” under a school desk.

There are uncomfortable parallels between that time and now, and we have no Fair Witnesses to help us separate the wheat from the chaff and the needle from the haystack as we form our opinions about the world. Corporations also owned newspapers and television stations in the ‘60s, and there was competition for control of the narrative then as well as now, but the number of independent sources was much greater than what we have today.

While this holds true for mainstream sources, the opposite is true in cyberspace, where everyone with a phone or a computer is a reporter, a commentator, and an influencer. Here you can always find someone who agrees with absolutely anything that you prefer to believe. It is the purest form of free speech we have, but in this realm, there is about as much falsehood as fact. Here amid the noise, you can also find the facts which some would do just about anything to conceal, and that’s one of the reasons why the struggle for control of this space is ongoing.

So how do we tell the difference between fact and fiction, or even fact and interpretation? We don’t have Fair Witnesses, and we don’t trust our fact-checkers, some of whom are suspected of being compromised as well. How did the voters who made the difference for Trump, for the Senate and the House—not the ones who would have voted for Republicans anyhow, but the large numbers who switched parties when it came time to mark their ballots—how did they decide what was fair and what was important?

Among the voters who empowered the Republican sweep, I think it came down to a contest between the productive class and the contemplative class. Hold on. I’m not saying that contemplative people can’t be productive and that productive people are not thinkers, and I’m not fond of the word “class” in this context, but bear with me.

When “Stranger in a Strange Land” was written, the majority of college-educated voters were Republicans. Voting Republican was considered “smart business,” and the “little guy” voted Democrat. By the time Obama came to office, a shift to the left was well underway, and in 2016, the majority of college-educated voters, for the first time, voted for the Democrat.

Put another way, the Democrats in 2024 missed the fact that the Republicans had become the “big tent” party while the Democrats were perceived as the party of the elites. They missed some obvious clues, like going into debt to pay for celebrity endorsements while Trump was serving french fries and riding in a garbage truck. The information they trusted, mainstream media, the networks, the legacy media, and prestige press — were not fair witnesses.

The contemplative class is the idea factory of society, and when your raison d’être is ideas, your ideas can become as personal as anything you hold dear, and you will defend them passionately. The contemplative class has a tendency to vote for ideas, which become ideals when they are insulated from the requirements of living and working in the productive class. The problem with ideals at election time is that ideals require ideal conditions in order to function ideally.

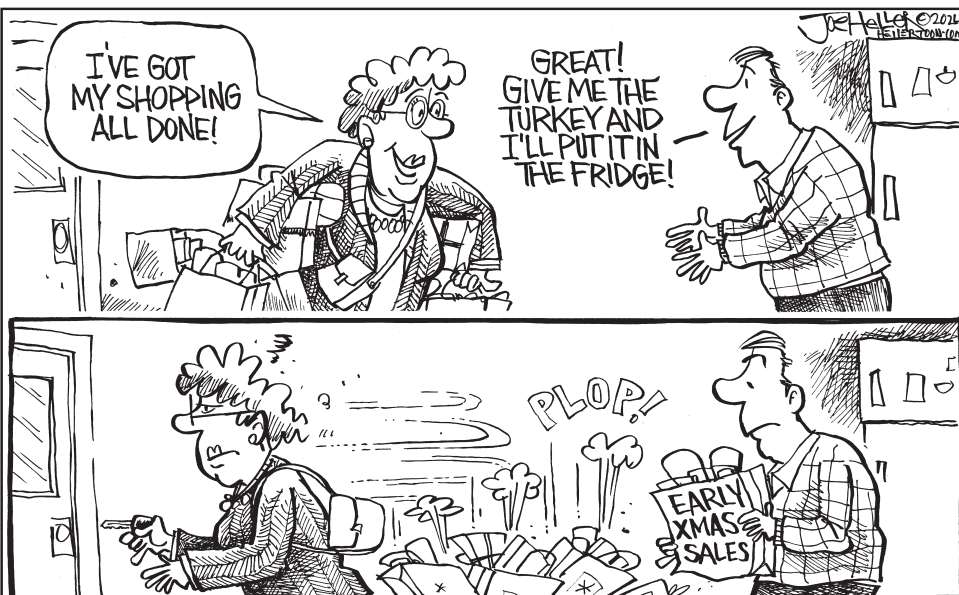
The productive class certainly has ideals as well. Many of those are faith-based. When it’s a question of faith, faith usually always gets the vote. Beyond that, ideals take a back seat to pragmatism. I have to get back to work. Groceries are too expensive, and I don’t know how we’re going to pay the

See *Outside the Box* continued...

## Outside The Box

By: Don Perry

worldoutsidethebox.com



## Joro Spiders

Joro spiders are making their presence known in the Georgia Mountains. These spiders have been in Georgia since 2014, but have not been seen very much until this year in Union and Towns counties. Let’s talk about these invasive spiders and what their presence here could mean.



Joro spiders’ scientific name is *Trichonephila clavata*. They are native to Japan and East Asia. In Asia, they have a very large and diverse native range. It is possible that eventually they will be found in all of Georgia, the southeast, and the eastern US. The females in this species are quite large with legs that can be up to 3

inches long. Their abdomen is yellow and teal bands with red splotches near the end. The males on the other hand are much smaller and do not have as striking of colors on their body.

These spiders are in the orb weaver family, which means that they spin very ornate and large webs. If you picture what a classic, cartoon spider web looks like in your mind, that is very similar to a Joro web. Their web silk is unusually strong, and is capable of even catching small birds. The female’s silks have a golden yellow color to them, that matches their body coloring. Because these webs are so strong they can span 10 feet or more. I’ve seen single strands stretching 20 feet from tree to tree. If you have walked through the woods this fall and encountered webs that were larger and stronger than usual, you have likely walked through a Joro web.

Because the females are so big and their webs are massive, they can be a bit spooky. The speed that they are able to reconstruct their webs with is impressive. Even though they are big and scary looking, they pose virtually no threat to people. They run away when the encounter people, and very rarely actually bite.

The fall is the time of year when you see them the most, because their size and population have peaked. In the fall the females will lay eggs that overwinter. These egg masses may be attached to leaves, bark, or structures. These eggs will hatch in May. Over the course of the summer the spiders grow in size until they are mature in the late summer and fall.

Joro spiders can spread by hitching a ride on vehicles. When they are young in the spring the baby spiders can spread by creating parachutes out of webs that catch the wind. These parachutes allow them to travel long distances.

Joro spiders are not dangerous to people or pets. Their webs are a nuisance when they are in your yard or you are walking through the woods. Their full impact on our ecosystem is not fully understood yet. Any of their webs that are covering walkways, decks, doorways, pollinator gardens, or beehives should be removed.

If you have questions about Joro spiders contact your County Extension Office or email me at [Jacob.Williams@uga.edu](mailto:Jacob.Williams@uga.edu).

## Letters To The Editor

### Thank You

Dear Editor,

Now that the November 2024 General Election is behind us, I would like to offer some words of thanks and praise on behalf of the Towns County Board of Elections and Registration.

First, to the Poll Workers: You are the front line of every election and you handled this one with grace and aplomb. You worked long, hard days, yet even when the lines were at their longest, voters overwhelmingly complimented you on your efficiency and wonderful attitudes. Thank you.

Next, to the Poll Watchers: You are the linebackers, keeping everything in check and making sure any irregularities are properly reported. Please know that your meticulous notes were received and appreciated. Thank you.

Now on to the voters of this beautiful county: You are the reason we are here. Without you, the process would not succeed. However, not only did you succeed, you showed up in record numbers. Towns County had the highest percentage of voter turnout in the State of Georgia during the entire period of early voting. Thank you.

And, of course, our First Responders: You are the reason our voters felt safe. The Sheriff’s Deputies were on hand throughout early voting and on Election Day to handle any shenanigans, of which there were none. The EMT paramedics who tended to one of our voters who had fallen ill did a wonderful job. So wonderful, in fact, that once the voter was discharged from the hospital, he came right back and voted. Thank you.

Finally, to our amazing workers at the Office of Elections and Registration: You are the glue that makes this all come together. Registrar Teresa Connor, you are a machine. Your painstaking attention to detail kept everything organized, and when the occasional voter had an issue with registration, you quickly handled the matter with your usual friendly, polite and sunny personality. Elections Coordinator Sue Sutton, you are amazing. You are the quarterback, leading this voter here, that worker there, and making sure everyone is properly nourished along the way. I would follow you into battle anywhere. Last, but most certainly not least, Elections Supervisor Rachel Edwards, you are a rock star. With you manning the helm, your office just took the single most hotly contested general election in modern history, with the highest percentage of voter turnout ever seen in Towns County, and knocked it out of the park. Because of each of you incredibly talented people, this election was the massive success that it was. Thank you.

**Steven Harper, Chair**  
Towns County Board of Elections and Registration

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## Celebrate Elections...

Celebrate Elections, Don't Dread Them!

By Yonatan Hamburger and Tzali Reicher

With the presidential election behind us, Americans have reason to take a moment and celebrate.

The election season – with its passionate debates and competing visions – showcased the strength and resilience of our democratic system, which has stood as a beacon of freedom and stability for generations. Each voice, each vote, has shaped the direction our nation will now take. And, as one party steps back to let another lead, we witness an inspiring reminder of our democracy’s power: the peaceful transition of authority.

This process is greater than any party or individual. It’s a testament to our commitment to participation, respect, and resilience – a national covenant to uphold a system where different perspectives can coexist and contribute to our common good. The Torah speaks to the value of harmony, of embracing diverse voices to build a unified whole, reminding us that true strength lies in our ability to hold differing opinions while remaining committed to a shared purpose.

The Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, of righteous memory, encouraged public engagement and saw voting as a profound responsibility, a way to contribute to our communities and express our thoughts on our nation’s course. He viewed every person’s role in governance as an honor, underscoring that, even amid differences, our democracy’s strength lies in unity and stability.

Ours is a grand experiment in self-governance. Since its founding, this system has withstood challenges, adapting and evolving over time. Beyond individual policies or parties, it’s our collective commitment to civic duty that gives this system its lasting power. We are not simply governed; we are participants in shaping the framework that keeps our nation strong.

For those in the Jewish tradition, civic responsibility resonates deeply. Involving oneself in community decisions is both a duty and an honor – a commitment to the tzibbur, the collective. Judaism places such high value on community and people coming together that many prayers can only be said when a minimum of 10 people are gathered, because, as it says in Ethics of Our Fathers, the Divine Presence rests on people who gather to study together or do a communal good. Every vote cast respects the diversity of a nation, reflecting our dedication to each other’s well-being while staying true to shared values. This election reminds us of the power we hold together, with each ballot carrying weight in shaping the world around us.

Election season can be tiring, with all the ads, debates, and constant back-and-forth. But this fatigue is, in a way, a privilege – it shows that we live in a place where we have a real choice, something many around the world don’t have. Our right to vote is more than just an obligation; it’s a privilege, a chance to help shape our country’s path. The cycle of leaders stepping down and others stepping up brings new voices, ideas, and changes, while still respecting the stability tradition provides, and in a few short years, we will have the opportunity again to determine if this leadership is working or if it’s time for something new. This rhythm is what keeps our nation alive and moving forward.

For those whose candidate didn’t win, disappointment is natural, but it, too, is a testimony to the greatness of our system. No matter who leads, the system remains steady, fostering continuity while allowing for change. And in time, even those feeling discouraged may be surprised by positive developments and unexpected progress that the new leadership brings – not just to our country but to the world.

Our democracy is a model that has inspired others globally, a system where governance serves the people and where power is peacefully transferred. This week, as we reflect on the election, we can feel grateful for a system where leadership is chosen, not imposed, where authority is accountable, and where each citizen has a voice in the future.

As the next administration steps in, we look forward with hope, trusting that they will fulfill their duty to the nation until the time for change comes again. In a world too often marked by division, our democracy serves as an example of cooperation and respect. Let us celebrate this election season as a reminder of our privilege, honoring the responsibility that each vote holds, and embracing a system that allows for both spirited debate and unity in our shared future.

*Yonatan Hamburger is a rabbi and writer serving spiritual seekers of all persuasions on behalf of Chabad of Rural Georgia. Tzali Reicher is a rabbi and writer serving communities throughout the regional South. You can reach them at [y@tasteofiorah.org](mailto:y@tasteofiorah.org).*

### Outside the Box continued

bills this month. I’m spending 30% of my income on rent. I worked hard to come to America, and I don’t want to lose my job to someone who will work for a lot less. Why do they think they know me just because I’m Black?

You may disagree with any or all of these statements, but they are a fair witness to statements made by swing voters when asked why they voted for Republicans. Finally, in 2024, there was a small but significant shift among college-educated voters and urban voters back to Republican candidates. So productive, contemplative, or both, the fair witness for the swing voter this year turns out to be common sense. That doesn’t mean that common sense is always right, but if you want to win elections, it pays to give it some consideration.

Echos from Sinai  
"Torah for Everyone"  
Rabbi Yonatan Hamburger



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