

OLD HOMETOWN

150 From the Republican Daily Journal and Daily Kansas Tribune for Thursday, Dec. 16, 1875:
● “LOCAL NEWS. – Try White’s famous breakfast bacon.... Remember Chancellor Marvin’s lecture to-night.... Oliver Paul has begun work on the city cisterns.... Nothing of interest occurred yesterday in the District Court.... A dance in North Lawrence, Tuesday evening broke up with a fight. No one severely hurt.”
● “Negotiations are in progress for the erection of a new flouring mill on the North side, to be run by water power. Particulars announced soon.”

100 From the Lawrence Daily Journal-World for Wednesday, Dec. 16, 1925:
● “Several students of the University of Kansas plan to remain in Lawrence during the Christmas vacation and are searching for employment during that time. The employment office of the Y. M. C. A. will be open every morning of the vacation, except Christmas and New Year’s days.”
● “LAWRENCE STORE TO CHANGE HANDS. – The Great Atlantic and Pacific Tea Company has made arrangements to take over a number of Grand Union grocery stores, the store in Lawrence among them. The present company will close its books Saturday night and the new company will be in charge Monday morning, according to the arrangement.”

75 From the Lawrence Daily Journal-World for Saturday, Dec. 16, 1950:
● “The physical education department at K. U. warned today that the thawing weather the last few days has made Potter lake unsafe for skating. Henry Shenk, chairman of the department, said that several youngsters have been attempting to skate, but the ice is cracking badly.”
● “The free wrapping station in the Chamber of Commerce rooms, Wren building, will remain open until 9 o’clock tonight for the convenience of evening shoppers.”
● “Chancellor Deane W. Malott of the University of Kansas today informed the Journal-World of five major projects besides the fieldhouse-armory that the university and its medical school will request from the 1951 Kansas legislature. For the university itself, Chancellor Malott listed a fine arts and music building, men’s and women’s dormitories, and added biology department space in the form of an addition to Snow hall.”
● “K. U. has had its seismograph for only a short time but already the intricate machine that records earth disturbances is proving valuable. There were two earthquakes in the American hemisphere this week and the Lindley hall apparatus recorded them both almost perfectly.”
● “It is to the credit of Kansas newspapers that very few of them have accepted the advertising of intoxicating liquor, although the prohibitory law was repealed. The editors of such papers realize the misery and crime due to the use of intoxicants and wish to have no part in increasing their use, distribution, and sale.... It is to be regretted that two of the magazines of today with large circulation, seemingly depend quite largely on liquor advertising.... Life and Time come out just before the holidays with central two page spreads of such objectional matter.... Liquor advertising tries to convey the idea that it is smart and stylish to drink, when undoubtedly drinking is the most dangerous and degenerating habit that can possibly be formed.”

— *Compiled by Sarah Parsons. To see more, go online to www.facebook.com/DailyLawrenceHistory.*

Owens’ shameful conspiracy theories

Few would have guessed that Erika Kirk would have to spend energy these last few, heart-breaking months fending off a right-wing influencer bent on implicating her slain husband’s own organization, TPUSA, in his assassination.

Here we are, though. Influential voices on the right have become more and more conspiratorial in recent years, and now, the paranoia is being wielded against its own.

In the aftermath of the Kirk assassination, the talk was of an energized MAGA movement picking up his baton. Instead, TPUSA has been slandered nearly every single day by one of the loudest right-wing voices on the internet for allegedly carrying out a murderous coup against its own leader.

Candace Owens, a former TPUSA employee and a friend of Charlie Kirk, has been the primary author of this libel. She’s taken an open-and-shut murder case and turned it into a whodunit.

In episode after episode, she invests enormous significance in minutiae, asks for help from listeners in tracking down supposedly crucial information, attacks anyone who pushes back against her accusations, and suggests that she could be



Rich Lowry

killed at any time by the same shadowy forces that took out Kirk.

And it all comes back to TPUSA, whose leaders were allegedly in on the crime in order to elevate themselves once Charlie Kirk was out of the way.

This is fantastical, vile stuff, but no one can say: “Oh, we’re so disappointed in Candace. What happened to her?”

She believes the moon landing was a fabrication (Stanley Kubrick filmed the whole thing) and dinosaurs are “fake and gay.”

The Jews have a special place in her conspiracies. Harvard is a Mossad base. Israel was involved in the Sept. 11 attack. The Holocaust is exaggerated or fake, and Elie Wiesel is a liar. The Jews carried out the Bolshevik Revolution in order to exterminate Christians. The Jews killed JFK and, for some reason, also Michael Jackson.

Tucker Carlson, Owens’ friend and ally, is adopting a judicious, wait-and-see attitude about whether TPUSA killed its own leader or not. But he, too, is a fount of conspiracies, most recently promoting the idea that the government is seeding the sky with toxic “chemtrails.”

Whereas once conspiratorial thinking was a guarantee of marginality, now it is no bar to obtaining a huge audience, or may even help. Outlandish theories generate passion and interest, and they are rewarded by social-media algorithms.

It can all be very profitable, making it difficult to distinguish between genuine irrationality and rank profit-making.

A Candace Owens lacks conventional influence. Officeholders aren’t seeking her favor or asking for her advice. But she has single-handedly defined the debate in the aftermath of Kirk’s death in a way few other media figures could.

Its a symptom of the state of the influencer eco-system that many of the MAGA figures now — thankfully — denouncing Owens for her crackpot Charlie Kirk theories have plenty of crackpot theories of their own. It was telling that when Tucker Carlson interviewed white nationalist Nick

Fuentes, each confessed that he thought the other was a “fed,” or working undercover for federal law-enforcement.

Now, of course, we should insist that anything the government or any other official body tells us is backed up by reliable evidence. And sometime conspiracies are real. There were indeed attempted cover-ups of the likelihood that COVID emanated from a Chinese lab, and of the senescence of President Joe Biden.

There’s a difference, though, between a healthy skepticism and runaway paranoia; the former requires a careful adherence to facts, the latter dispenses with them. The Candace Owens take on the Kirk assassination is supposed to be hardheaded in rejecting the official “narrative.” In actuality, it depends on the credulousness of her listeners, who are asked to buy into a fanciful counter-narrative that depends entirely on one cynical podcaster’s say-so.

In this regard, maybe her audience isn’t conspiratorial-minded enough, and should consider the possibility that even Candace Owens isn’t on the up-and-up.

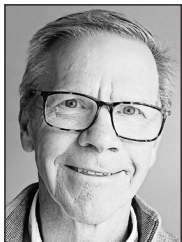
— *Rich Lowry is a columnist with King Features Syndicate.*



YOUR TURN

We don’t need a hero; we need each other

By Scott Morgan



Morgan

Kansans have a palpable hunger to do something. The times feel strange, the anger relentless, the cruelty almost casual. Most of us look around at the Kansans we encounter, whether at work, in the grocery store, at church, just walking down the street, and we think, they don’t seem angry or cruel. So why do our politics look like this? Why doesn’t “someone” do “something”?

Some blame social media. Others point to low-turnout primaries or the merchants of fear who profit from outrage. They’re not wrong. But the deeper problem is that too many sensible people have stepped back, convinced that decency can’t win. When moderates stay silent, the extremes take the microphone.

The truth is that Kansans who feel this way aren’t powerless. The “someone” we’re waiting for is us, the people who still believe in fairness and basic decency. The “something” is standing together and finding our political power. It doesn’t take magic or millions of dollars. It takes neighbors deciding that cynicism isn’t wisdom, giving up isn’t an option, and that it’s time to speak with a common voice.

The merchants of fear hope we never figure that out. Their business depends on our division. They’ve built entire careers selling the idea that moderation is weakness. They want

you to believe that those out of power are too busy or too lazy to organize. But history, especially Kansas history, tells a different story.

Kansas has been here before. The first Free State Party was born in 1855 because neither the Whigs nor the Democrats were willing to face the moral crisis of slavery. Ordinary Kansans decided that if the existing parties wouldn’t stand for freedom and human dignity, they would. That movement didn’t just shape Kansas; it helped shape the nation.

Four decades later, when powerful monopolies and rising debt crushed family farmers, Kansas led again. The Populist Party rose up to demand fairness. In the 1890s, Populists in Kansas won a U.S. Senate seat, several congressional seats, two governorships, and control of the Kansas House.

Their ideas were later absorbed by Democrats and challenged by a new Republican progressive movement. The upstart parties didn’t last forever, but they changed the course of both major parties.

History’s lesson is simple: When the old coalitions stop working, new ones emerge. We’re living through such a

moment again. Moderate Republicans were told to leave their party starting in the 1990s. Democrats today are pulled between competing visions of who they are. Both parties have a problem: Their extremes dominate, and moderates no longer have a true political home.

It’s time for the center-left and center-right to turn away from their fringes and make common cause with each other. Former moderate Republicans, centrist Democrats, and the growing number of independents have far more in common with each other than with the extremes shouting at both ends. We just need to realize it.

That’s why a group of us made up of Republicans, Democrats and Independents, are working to build a new Free State Party (joinfreestate.org). Our first goal is modest but meaningful: flip five Kansas House seats to break the Republican supermajority. We’re not spoilers. Our focus is on those seats without a choice in the general election.

In 2024, 40% of Kansas House seats went uncontested. In 2022, it was half. We’re not spoilers if the parties won’t even run against each other. Starting small and at the grassroots level is how we will build something possible and lasting.

Moderates have long trusted the system to work itself out. But the system is breaking, and when the center doesn’t hold, it

creates space for voices that do not speak for the broad public.

We don’t have to give up or give in. We can build a political home for the reasonable middle. Not some bland, neutral space, but one grounded in principle. One that starts in Kansas and starts with each of us.

This isn’t radical, it’s just Kansas common sense. Dwight Eisenhower knew this 70 years ago when he committed his administration “...to a program of progressive moderation, liberal in its human concerns, conservative in its economic proposals, constructively dynamic and optimistic in its appraisal of the future.”

You don’t have to change who you are to help. You just have to stop assuming someone else will do it for you, or worse, that it’s not possible. Kansas has already shown that it is possible. We proved it again in the 2022 abortion amendment vote. Give up or stand up. The choice is ours.

— *Scott Morgan is the co-chair of the Free State Party.*

Letters to the editor

● Letters should be 250 words or fewer and can be submitted via email at letters@ljworld.com.