

MEMO FROM EMMETT MAYOR GORDON W. PETRIE

SUBJECT: JFK's INAUGURAL ADDRESS, SACAJAWEA AND TODAY'S CULTURE

In the last half of January 1961, John F. Kennedy had been elected the 35th US President the previous November and POTUS 34, Dwight D. Eisenhower, had given his farewell address to our nation, warning of the Military-Industrial Complex's threat to our democracy. Clueless to such existential danger, I had just turned 13, attended the seventh grade at Jenifer Junior High School in Lewiston, and thought Jackie Kennedy would make a far superior First Lady over the dowdy Mamie Eisenhower. Jackie was like my mom. Mamie was like my grandmother, except dowdier. How apt her maiden name: Doud.

Jenifer Junior High, by the way, was named after Joel Jenifer, the popular Superintendent of Schools in Lewiston before, during and, for a time, after the war years. So, when Lewiston built two new junior highs in 1959-60, one was named after Mr. Jenifer. The other junior high, however, received the name of the intrepid caretaker, interpreter and guide to the Lewis-Clark Expedition, Sacajawea (or, if you insist, Sacagawea).

Why would I connect Kennedy and Sacajawea? They're separated in time and didn't even have similar backgrounds—unless Sacajawea attended Harvard. (She did not; however, thanks to William Clark, her son by Charbonneau, John Baptiste, attended the St. Louis Academy after the Corps of Discovery returned to St. Louis.) Regardless, Kennedy and Sacajawea shared similar ideas about how the world worked, including our proper place in it.

On that magical January 20th, 1961, Robert Frost could not read his poem at Kennedy's Inaugural due to a glaring sun, and after waiving off LBJ's attempt to shield his blowing papers with a top hat, the Poet Laurette simply recited another poem from memory; then came Kennedy's Inaugural address. He contended that a torch had passed to a new generation, uttering the most memorable line from his speech and, perhaps, his entire "1000-day" presidency: "Ask not what your country can do for you, ask what you can do for your country."

Unquestionably, Sacajawea possessed a more honest and mature view about our place in the world compared to a mid-twentieth century, hugely-optimistic politician. Especially since Kennedy simply modified his headmaster's common saying at the private school he once attended; an educator who encouraged each cohort entering Choate not to "...ask what Choate can do for you, but ask what you can do for Choate". Sacajawea, on the other hand, reportedly uttered two

original and profound statements later in her life. First: “Everything I do is for my people.” Second: “Don’t go around saying the world owes you a living.”

While her words still resonate, I only wish she had a physical presence. She could teach our politicians much about service and who owes what to whom—especially those leaning to the left. Somehow, the world now owes a certain generation a free education, free health care, subsidized housing, and \$1000 per month. The last “freebie” constitutes Andrew Yang’s gift to the commonweal. Yang’s proposal to give \$1,000 a month to every American over the age of 18, irrespective of employment, demonstrates just how far we’ve regressed in merely three generations from Kennedy’s clarion call, while not forgetting Sacajawea’s admonition two hundred years ago. Plainly, we live in an upside-down world.

Regrettably, we seem to have trained our children to be narcissists. Though likely an unintended consequence, the fact remains we have created a culture that operates in an ego-centric paradigm never before seen since the 1782 adoption of the Latin phrase *E PLURIBUS UNUM* as the motto for the US Seal. By the time the Eisenhower administration came along, we could already see cracks in the “one nation” wall thanks, in part, to Benjamin Spock’s 1946 Baby and Child Care opus promoting permissive, instant gratification child-rearing practices. This paved the way to supplant “critical thinking” with “critical theory” as advocated by Marxists like Alinsky, Horkheimer and Marcuse in our institutions of “higher learning”. See Breitbart, *Righteous Indignation*, Ch. 6.

Hence, when we ask a young person to do something that smacks of serving others and they have matriculated from one of the (as Andrew Breitbart might put it) “Victim-Centric, Identity-Politics Re-education Camps” aka colleges or universities, quote Gandhi: “The best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of others.”

If your target has not yet matriculated from one of the camps, try Benjamin Franklin’s comment (provided the target knows about Franklin), “For my own Part, when I am employed in serving others, I do not look upon myself as conferring Favours, but as paying Debts” [sic]. Bottom line: volunteer; make a difference; say, “Thanks,” to your neighbors. Serving others provides its own reward.