

A MISERABLE OLD WORLD, *A Better New World*



By Ben Rosen

PANDEMIC In 2020, a new coronavirus killed over a third of a million people in the U.S. Worse, so many died unnecessarily, especially when compared with mortalities in scores of countries around the world. Whatever happened to “American exceptionalism”?

POLITICS has led to polarization. In 2020, our political system helped flip another hallowed American expression, “Love Thy Neighbor,” into its polarizing opposite.

PROTESTS For 400 years our country has unfairly stymied Black America’s access to equal opportunity, housing, education, healthcare, and employment. Four centuries of systemic racism! Then, in 2020, a seemingly never-ending sequence of police brutalities against Blacks reached its nadir with the barbarous killing of George Floyd. The result—protests that touched the soul of America.

Depressing, indeed.
But... there is a bright side.

HEALTHY WORLD Emerging from the exigencies of the pandemic, the world’s scientists developed impressive

new skills, rose to the occasion, and created effective vaccines in record time. These skills are now available to the world to counter future health emergencies.

HAPPY WORLD The electorate hates political polarization. The same electorate just elected a presidential moderate. As a result, there is now credible hope—and yes, it is still hope—that we have a chance to return to a more unified body politic.

HUMANE WORLD Finally, over our history we have had two opportunities to end systemic racism—after the Civil War with the abolition of slavery, and during the 1960s when meaningful civil rights legislation was enacted. As is well known, we blew both chances. But now, at the start of a new George Floyd-inspired era, America has before it what may be its last chance to establish a color-blind society, to start on the path toward ending systemic racism.

Too optimistic? Not at all. Maybe it’s because I look at the world through Rosen-colored glasses. Or maybe it’s because I’m off to get some of that Carondelet Street Caramel.



Ben was born in Depression-era New Orleans the day that FDR (then in office for seven days) closed the nation’s banks. Not a good sign.

After studying engineering at Caltech and Stanford, Ben moved into a \$55-per-month beach cottage in Malibu (it was a while ago) and bought a used Austin-Healey. Then, when his rent was raised (to \$65), he left for a fourth-floor walkup in Manhattan. There, he soon sailed on the ocean-liner Liberté to France. After six months on the beaches in Nice and Torremolinos, well-tanned but broke, Ben returned to New York and went legit—coat, tie, job.

He spent some time on Wall Street as a securities analyst (Morgan Stanley) until starting a venture capital firm with his Cajun partner, L.J. Sevin. Together, they helped create a bunch of tech companies and actually enjoyed what they were doing. Then, Ben retired to a life in the not-for-profit world—music (NY Phil and Met Opera), health care (Memorial Sloan Kettering) and higher ed (Caltech, where he was erstwhile chair and has been a board member for 34 years).

His biggest life achievement was convincing New Orleans’ Donna Perret to marry him. And to move with him to NYC, thereby alienating all the many New Orleanians who loved Donna and didn’t want her to leave home.

Another of Ben’s favorite accomplishments was, with Donna, creating the ideas festival Kent Presents, located in bucolic, northwestern Connecticut. Each year at this charitable three-day summer event, they attract 400 attendees and 75 pretty impressive speakers (e.g., seven Nobelists as well as some regular people) who opined on a potpourri of topics, from origami to gravitational waves.

Ben is proudest of being the highest-handicap-ever golfer to have made three holes in one.



Carondelet Street Caramel

BEN ROSEN'S RECIPE, HANDED DOWN
FROM HIS MOTHER, ANNA ROSEN.



Photo by Kenny Morrison

INGREDIENT

Just one: A can of sweetened condensed milk. Any brand, any size, but it must be a can. And it cannot be evaporated milk.

HOW TO PREPARE

Drop the unopened can of sweetened condensed milk into a very large pot of boiling water.

Simmer for four hours. As the water evaporates, add more water periodically in order to keep the waterline above the can. At the four hour mark, pour out the hot water, refill the pot with cold water, and let cool. Then place the (still-unopened) can in the refrigerator long enough to get cold. Now remove the can, open it, and...*voilà*. Perfect caramel.

Scoop out your Carondelet Street Caramel and enjoy it with any of the 739 or so dishes that are rendered ambrosial by enhancing them with caramel.

Note: The name pays homage to my first taste of caramel made using this recipe in the 1930s when I lived on Carondelet at Second Street in New Orleans. I moved on, but the memory lingers.

Caution: Whenever eating Carondelet Street Caramel, prudence suggests that a dentist be nearby.

Aha moment! After 80-plus years of eating caramel, it just dawned on me why I haven't yet died of cavities—my father was a dentist.