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# OPINIONS & VIEWPOINTS



## HISTORICALLY SPEAKING

current events through a historical lens

Dr. James Finck, USAO History Professor

### Prevailing Winds: Switching Political Parties over Candidate Support

By James Finck, Ph. D.

In a recent CNN interview, Alaska Sen. Lisa Murkowski hinted that he she is considering leaving the Republican Party. Murkowski has been a long-time opponent of former President Donald Trump and is struggling with the idea of Trump leading her party. Murkowski is not the first to leave the party over a personality, and historically speaking, switching parties has even brought great reward.

Murkowski, who was an avid Nikki Haley supporter, claims she is not the only Republican frustrated with the GOP's direction in supporting a controversial candidate like Trump, but she is not considering joining the Democratic Party either. She is just as frustrated with Biden as she is with Trump, so she is considering becoming an independent.

It should not be surprising that another president, Andrew Jackson, who had a large yet antagonizing personality, also caused dissatisfaction. Anyone who reads this column knows that one of the presidents I most compared to Trump was Jackson. Trump himself has drawn comparisons and showed his admiration of Jackson when he hung his portrait in the Oval Office. Like Trump, Jackson could rub people wrong, which was the case of John Tyler of Virginia.

Tyler entered politics in 1816 as a representative to Congress and part of the Jeffersonian Republican Party. Like his fellow Virginians, he was a strong supporter of states' rights and believed in a strict interpretation of the Constitution. In the short time that America had a one-party system (1816-1828) Tyler had become concerned with President John Quincy Adams' nationalist policies and began supporting the Jackson wing of the party who called themselves Democratic Republicans. When Jackson broke from the Republicans, now calling himself simply a Democrat, he ran against Adams and won in 1828 with Tyler as a loyal supporter.

While Tyler had always supported the Republican/Democrats, he started to find himself at odds with Jackson. While Jackson claimed he supported small government, his beliefs only seemed to apply to Congress and the courts. When it came to the power of the president, Jackson was seemingly doing more to strengthen the power of that office. During his term Jackson vetoed more bills than all the previous presidents combined and completely ignored the Supreme Court's ruling when it came to Indian Removal. Yet what put Tyler over the top was the Nullification Crisis of 1833.

Back in 1828, before Adams left office, he signed into law a high tariff that became known as the Tariff of Abominations by Southerners. Adams' vice president, John C. Calhoun, led the attack against the tariff but only went so far knowing that when

Jackson took office, he would rectify the problem. However, to Calhoun's surprise, now Jackson's vice president, Jackson kept the tariff to gain Northern support. In a tuff, Calhoun returned to South Carolina and led the state to officially nullify the tariff in their state. Jackson's response was to call up the army and march on South Carolina almost igniting a civil war 30 years before the actual Civil War. With Jackson's actions, Tyler left the Democratic Party to join with a new party founded to fight against Jackson known as the Whigs.

Jumping ahead to 1840, the Whig Part was looking for a first win, so they stole the Democrats' handbook and ran a military hero from Ohio, William Henry Harrison, the hero of the Battle of Tippecanoe. To appease the Southern wing of the party, round out the ticket, and possibly appeal to some Democrats, the Whigs put Tyler on the ticket as V.P. It also led to a nifty jingle, "Tippecanoe and Tyler, Too." With their catchy jingle the Whigs won the presidency only to lose. Harrison gave an incredibly long inauguration address in the cold, caught pneumonia, and died 31 days later. Suddenly instead of a Whig president, they had Whig in name only, but one who still supported the ideas of states' rights. Tyler spent his time as president fighting more with his own party than he did the Democrats, vetoing several bills passed by Whigs.

Because the Constitution did not say the vice president would become president, only exercise the power, many cabinet members felt they should have the true power and wanted Tyler to clear all decisions with them. Tyler rejected this idea, claiming he was the president now and would not address or open mail from anyone who referred to him as acting president or anything similar. In the end, his entire cabinet resigned. Tyler became a man without a party and was despised by both sides. My favorite Tyler story is that in his last month of office he held a grand celebration in the White House where he came out on the balcony and announced, "they cannot say now that I am a president without a party." Kind of a drop-the-mic moment.

It is unsure what will happen with Murkowski. She has not given any reason to think she would ever become a Democrat. But in a world of polarization, someone like her who could unite and pull from both sides of the aisle might look tempting for a party looking for a V.P.

*James Finck, Ph.D. is a professor of history at the University of Science and Arts of Oklahoma and writes for the Southwest Ledger. You can follow Historically Speaking on Facebook or at Historicallyspeaking.blog.*

## A word, please

### By June Casagrande

Years back, a reader of this column mentioned that, all of a sudden, she was hearing the word "whinge" everywhere. What was up with that, she wanted to know. I had no answer. To my recollection, that was the first time I'd ever come across the word "whinge."

Back then, I didn't know about Ngram Viewer — a Google service you can use to search published writing to learn how popular a word is over time. Ngram Viewer lets you choose from several different databases of published works, some dating back to 1800. Just put in the word and you'll see the percentage of books your word appeared in, plotted over time.

That's how I learned that my reader was right: "whinge," which means to complain or whine, was extremely rare in print until about 1980, when it suddenly began skyrocketing, peaking in 2012. So I wondered: Is "whinge" replacing "whine"? Ngram Viewer lets you plot words in comparison to each other, so I typed in "whinge, whine" and saw that my theory was wrong. "Whine," like "whinge," also started getting more popular around 1980, peaking in the 2010s. Yet "whine" remains far more common — appearing about 40 times as often as "whinge."

This all reminded me of another reader question I couldn't answer many years ago: Is "fraught with" losing ground to just plain-old "fraught"? In my experience, definitely. I never heard "fraught" by itself until pretty recently. So I searched them both. It turns out that the standalone "fraught" has gotten more popular in my lifetime, but that's only because it dipped in popularity in the decades leading up to the 1960s. For a century and a half before then, "fraught" without "with" was about as popular as it is today.

Sometimes, when I notice a word or phrase or spelling getting more popular, I get annoyed. I can't defend my reaction. Language changes, so I need to accept it. But when I've put in the effort to learn, say, how to spell "bandanna" then notice everyone, including professionals, spelling it "bandana," I can't help but bristle. I worry that my little nugget of spelling wisdom is being rendered obsolete by the passage of time. In the case of "bandanna," it is. The single-n spelling overtook the double-n spelling in the early 2010s, and dictionaries allow both spellings, so I don't expect it to recover anytime soon.

Because I edit a lot of marketing copy, I get a close-up look at annoying word trends like "immersive." Apparently, some years back, marketers figured this adjective can make any trip, amusement park or museum exhibit sound more intense. Everything is an "immersive experience" these days. Or is it just me? Nope. "Immersive," according to Ngram Viewer, was practically nonexistent till around 1990, when it began skyrocketing, with no end in sight, unfortunately.

Sometimes the language trends I notice in my work are not mirrored in the culture at large. For example, lately, I keep seeing "wellbeing" in place of "well-being." That's wrong, according to dictionaries and editing guides, and it's also fascinating because it's a window into how hyphenated terms slowly over time become closed terms. "Teen-ager" and "good-bye" are examples. But according to Ngram Viewer, "wellbeing" isn't any more popular relative to "well-being" than it's ever been, at least not through 2019, the last year the database includes. Both terms have gotten more popular, presumably because books and articles about health have been on the rise. But "well-being" remains far more common than its closed counterpart.

Ditto that for "step foot," as in "I wouldn't step foot in that restaurant," which I suddenly hear people say all the time instead of "set foot." They have both gotten more popular in print in recent years, but "set foot" has maintained a strong lead over "step foot," I'm pleased to say.

So if you ever find yourself wondering, "Is everyone using this word nowadays, or is it just me?" you can confirm or debunk your fears with just a few keystrokes..

— June Casagrande is the author of "The Joy of Syntax: A Simple Guide to All the Grammar You Know You Should Know." She can be reached at JuneTCN@aol.com.

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