

Butler celebration aims to broaden thinking

Butler University turns 150 this year, and we have chosen the theme of civil discourse to guide our celebration. Over the next year, we hope to spur members of the Indianapolis community to talk to each other and find common ground wherever possible.

We live in a time when many people seek out opinions that mirror and reinforce their own, rather than

trying to hear what others have to say. I'm saddened by that. We need to cross political, religious and ideological lines, to keep our

minds open to views with which we don't agree but are nonetheless as tenaciously believed by thoughtful people as the views we hold dear.

Toward that end, Butler has invited renowned commentator George Will and former U.S. Sen. Bill Bradley to share the Clowes Memorial Hall stage on Oct. 13, and former presidents Bill Clinton (Nov. 6) and George H.W. Bush (March 2) to speak at Hinkle Fieldhouse. Our annual Celebration of Diversity Lecture Series at Clowes Hall will include former congressman J.C. Watts (Jan. 30) as well as a joint appearance by scholars Cornel West and Michael Eric Dyson (April 7).

These events are free and open to the public. We invite you to attend — not just to hear the speakers you agree with, but to listen to the ideas and visions of all these thoughtful, committed leaders.

We often hear that the United States is hopelessly divided between red and blue states. I prefer to think that we have 50 purple states, made up of Democrats and Republicans, conservatives and liberals, all living side by side.



Fong

MY VIEW

Bobby Fong

There certainly is no unanimity of thought, nor does there need to be. In academia, discourse presumes disputation, but disputation governed by rules of logic and evidence, rhetoric and civility. There are ways to talk to one another and to sift through assertions to ascertain where each side's arguments are valid.

Understand, I am not suggesting that all arguments are equal or valid. But among the great issues of the day, there is room for discussion.

Too often, though, the discussions we need to have are reduced to shouting or sound bites. So much of our discourse is filled with ad hominem arguments condemning the other person rather than working through the issue. But even the devil can speak truths. And in a sound-bite culture, it's difficult to develop a complicated argument. We need careful, extended analysis, which is an essential part of civil discourse.

These are contentious times.

Butler University was also founded in a contentious time, by abolitionists such as Ovid Butler who advanced the controversial notions that slavery was wrong and that blacks and women were as intellectually capable and deserving of higher education as

white men.

Butler and his associates created a university that welcomed students, regardless of race or gender, to earn a diploma. One hundred fifty years later, his university proudly celebrates its history and continues to be inclusive by bringing in speakers of divergent views and giving audiences the opportunity to learn to listen — particularly when what's being expressed may be different from what they think.

■ Fong is president of Butler University.

We need careful, extended analysis, which is an essential part of civil discourse.