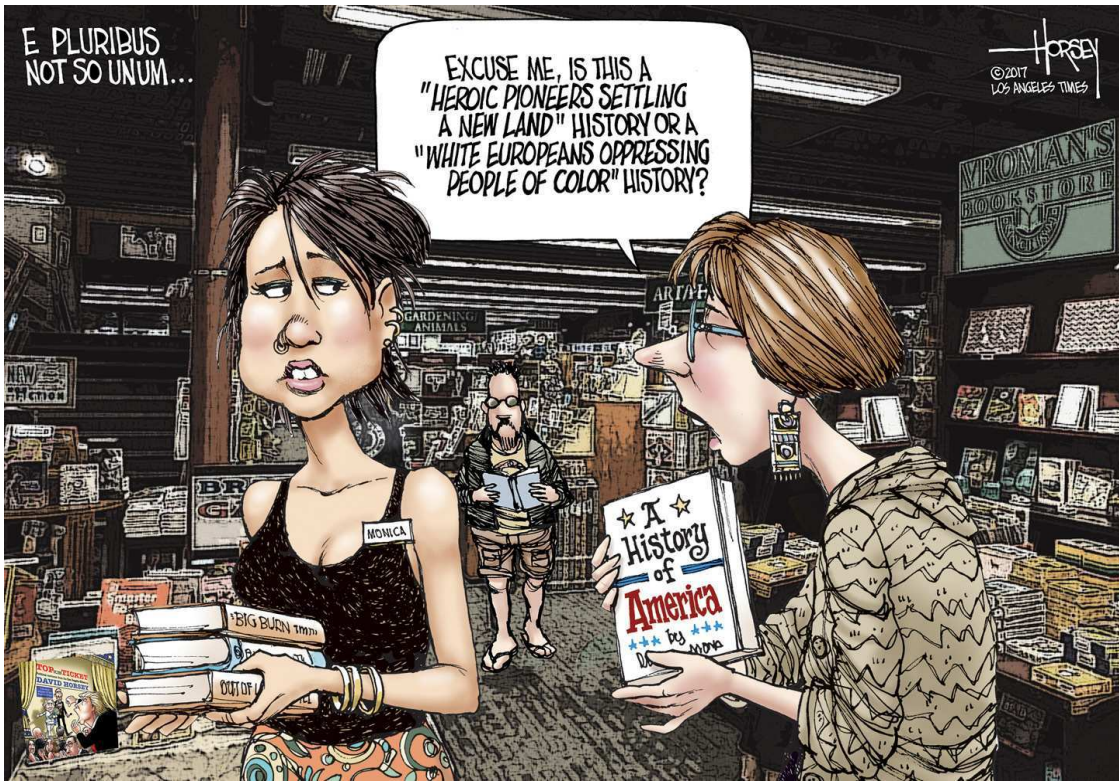


O P I N I O N



Jonah Goldberg

During President Trump's speech in Warsaw, Poland, on Thursday, he memorialized Pope John Paul II's momentous 1979 visit to the city.

For many historians, the Polish-born pope's mass in Victory Square, more than anything else, set in motion the events that led to the fall of the Berlin Wall a decade later and the dissolution of the Soviet Union soon thereafter. The people in attendance knew exactly what President Trump meant when he spoke of how the millions of Poles attending that mass "did not ask for wealth. They did not ask for privilege. Instead, one million Poles sang three simple words: 'We want God.'"

But I wasn't in the audience; I was watching it on TV and following Twitter's response to the speech. It was remarkable how many people immediately assumed Trump was talking crazy or just making stuff up (I am paraphrasing very charitably here).

I understand that response. Trump often does say crazy things. He does make stuff up — but usually not in prepared texts at big events.

It struck me how a lot of our political polarization is fueled by plain old ignorance.

Now, ignorance gets a bad rap. All ignorance means is that you lack knowledge about something. Ignorance isn't necessarily something to be proud of, but it need not be a cause for embarrassment or shame, either. I'm pretty ignorant about botany, the history of the Republic of Chad, the entire Kardashian oeuvre and countless other things. None of this burdens my conscience much.

The problem is that ignorance, being the absence of knowledge, is a vacuum, and nature abhors a vacuum. "The greatest enemy of knowledge is not ignorance; it is the illusion of knowledge," Daniel Boorstin, one of my favorite historians, once noted.

It is a common human foible to think you know more than you do and to assume that when someone, particularly someone you don't like, says something

you don't understand that the fault must be in the speaker, not the listener. "It's a universal law — intolerance is the first sign of an inadequate education," observed Alexander Solzhenitsyn. "An ill-educated person behaves with arrogant impatience, whereas truly profound education breeds humility."

Ideological and political polarization is a big concern these days, and commentators on the right and left have chewed the topic to masticated pulp. But it occurs to me that one unappreciated factor is widespread historical ignorance, and the arrogant impatience of reaching conclusions before thinking. The instantaneity of TV and Twitter only amplifies the problem.

For instance, on the Fourth of July, NPR's "Morning Edition" tweeted out the text of the Declaration of Independence, 140 characters at a time. The angry responses, from left and right, were a thing to behold. "Are you drunk?" "So, NPR is calling for revolution," "Glad you're being defunded, your show was never balanced," and so on.

World War II and the Cold War, particularly Vietnam, used to define the intellectual framework for how we understood many events. For people in their 30s, that framework changed to the Iraq War and the War on Terror.

I once heard a story second-hand of a general who was talking to an audience full of 20-somethings. He was explaining how the War on Terror challenged his generation's mindset. "I spent most of my career worrying about the Fulda Gap," he said. To which one "educated" fellow reportedly replied, "I know that Gap! It's in a mall near my house."

The Fulda Gap is the location in the German lowlands where the Soviets were most likely to launch an invasion of Europe.

Today, we face a multitude of challenges, at home and abroad, that can only be met by people with a modicum of historical literacy. If only Harry Potter could cast a spell to give it to us.

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Letters to the Editor...

The Nugget welcomes contributions from its readers, which must include the writer's name, address and phone number. Letters to the Editor is an open forum for the community and contains unsolicited opinions not necessarily shared by the Editor. The Nugget reserves the right to edit, omit, respond or ask for a response to letters submitted to the Editor. Letters should be no longer than 300 words. Unpublished items are not acknowledged or returned. The deadline for all letters is noon Monday.

To the Editor:

In response to Mr. Kopec's letter, it is surprising to me that people in Sisters have already forgotten that the traffic has backed up to Tollgate every summer for years.

I suppose that it is a relief to finally have something to blame it on. Please put the blame where it belongs on downtown Sisters where the traffic cannot move through town without dozens of stops for pedestrians. I, too, have sat at DQ and I am pleased to say that I think the roundabout is working.

Diana Pepperling

who were so full of life. She once said to me, "You can never really live until you've come to grips with dying."

The energy we waste trying to avoid the difficult realities of life frequently cause more problems for us and those we love than it is worth. Peace does indeed come from facing uncomfortable topics.

Thanks for this article.

Fr. Joseph Farber
Transfiguration Episcopal Church

To the Editor:

It should be illegal for the city to block the only effective route to/from Central Oregon for an event. This is no different or even worse than protesters blocking highways.

There should be a way to bypass the entire town (and not just one within the city).

Sisters is the worst!

Daniel Bower

To the Editor:

Re: "Am I ready? Facing death and grief," *The Nugget*, July 5, page 37:

This is a wonderful, thoughtful reflection.

As a teenager I was blessed to know a Methodist church leader who was slowly dying of leukemia. I've known few people

Sisters Weather Forecast

Courtesy of the National Weather Service, Pendleton, Oregon

Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday	Monday
Sunny 86/50	Sunny 88/49	Sunny 92/52	Sunny 91/52	Sunny 90/50	Sunny 87/na

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