PUBLIC SQUARE

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Old days aren't coming back

guest OPINION

By GENE H. McINTYRE

If it weren't for having been raised with the cultural admonition that 'real men don't cry,' it'd be easy for me to shed a tear nowadays over remembrances of my youth. During the small-person years of my childhood, my mother didn't work outside our home so I often enjoyed arriving home from school mid-afternoon to a freshly-baked cookie accompanied by a cold glass of milk. If I had a complaint to air, an inconsequential other-kid-related thing, she'd listen attentively then offer heartfelt sympathy.

The adults in our neighborhood were mainly first and second-generation immigrants from Finland, my grandparents having arrived from there in the late 19th century. Those people knew how to get along with one another as I witnessed few heated disagreements, I never saw a gun brandished nor shots fired while a fishing pole and clam shovel garnished every home's storage space. Three mothers nearby baked their family bread and were always good for a butter-slathered piece upon a slyly-timed "I'm so hungry!" announcement.

The Finnish Congregational Church was one block from us. The Finns are more commonly Lutherans but somehow that FCC got built in the 1880s (age took it down some 30 years ago). It was home to a capacity crowd on Easter Sundays and Christmas eves with smaller gatherings other Sunday mornings. The steeple held a huge bell whose vibrations carried for miles, beckoning parishioners and Sunday school kids for whom it was widely hoped they'd grow-up to deport themselves "like good Christians."

I never knew what political party was followed by anyone. My parents kept their political views to themselves although I was aware they voted dutifully every election. Thinking back to the fact that our part of Astoria —on the west side — was nicknamed Uniontown, the two biggest canneries being Union Fish and the Columbia River Packers Association, it makes some sense to me that Democrat may have been the most common affiliation. Otherwise, I remember seeing "I Like Ike" signs all over the city before the election of 1952.

I'm an older guy who could reminisce about one thing or another 'until blue in the face.' My days of old will never return any more than the days could reappear for those who preceded my arrival. Instead of begrudging lost yesterday's, it's strongly encouraged we meet head-on the challenges now upon us by our dramatically-changing weather conditions. One condition I never noticed growing up was climate change; nevertheless, we know it's real today and threatening human viability. It is my sincerest hope that any succeeding generations will not look back at the 2020s with the deepest of angry resentments that we did not rise en masse to action, proactively interceding to halt the predicted doom should not enough be done about it.

(Gene McIntyre lives in Keizer.)

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Colin Powell: Embodiment of the American Dream

By MARC THIESSEN

Gen. Colin Powell was the living embodiment of the American Dream. At a moment when some argue that America is an irredeemably racist country, his extraordinary life offers a very different message for young Americans.

In 1994, Powell spoke to the graduates at Howard University—one of America's great historically Black colleges—at a time of racial turmoil on campus. He took the opportunity to remind them they were blessed to have been born in the United States. "You have been given citizenship in a country like none other on Earth, with opportunities available to you like nowhere else on Earth, beyond anything that was available to me when I sat in a place similar to you 36 years ago."

Indeed, the only privilege Powell was born with was being an American. He was raised in the South Bronx by immigrant parents who came from Jamaica seeking a better life. They worked in New York's garment district—his mother as a seamstress and his father as a shipping clerk. Their son didn't go to the U.S. Military Academy at West Point or The Citadel. He was a "C" student who attended the City College of New York. But it was there that he discovered the Reserve Officers' Training Corps (ROTC)—an organization, he said, where "race, color, background, income meant nothing."

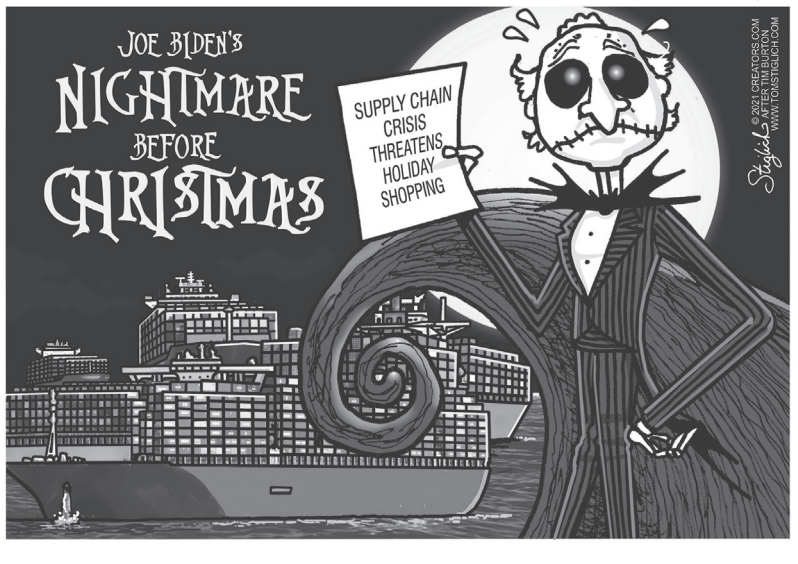
When he traveled to Fort Benning, Ga., in 1958 for basic training, there was only one motel on the way that would accept Black guests. But at Fort Benning, he found what he described as an "integrated society" where no one cared about the color of his skin, only what kind of soldier he could become. "The Army was living the democratic ideal ahead of the rest of America," he wrote in his autobiography *My American Journey*, and his military service "made it easier for me to love my country, with all its flaws, and to serve her with all my heart." Over the course of his remarkable career, he broke barrier after barrier—becoming the first Black national security adviser, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and secretary of state.

Yes, he told the Howard University students, racism still exists. But he urged them to always remember that "racism is a disease of the racist. Never let it become yours." He exhorted them not to allow "the dying hand of racism to rest on your shoulder, weighing you down. Always let racism always be someone else's burden to carry in their heart." Most of all, he told them to "believe in America with all your heart and soul, with all of your mind. Remember that it remains the 'last, best hope of Earth.'" America's faults, he said, "are yours to fix, not to curse." Remember, he told them, that "America is a family: There may be differences and disputes within the family, but we must not allow the family to be broken into warring factions."

He explained that when he talks to young people, he tells them not to blame external forces for the difficulties they face. We all fail, he said, and when you do, focus on "how to fix yourself, not to start pointing fingers at people." And never forget, he added, that in America anything is possible: "How the devil did I become secretary of state or a four-star general or commander of the largest group of soldiers in the United States Army?"

He's right. Only in America would Colin Powell's life have been possible. May he rest in peace—and may his example of unity and patriotism live on.

(Washington Post)



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