

# THE DAILY ASTORIAN

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## Welcome, Beit Salmon

It is good to hear that the Lower Columbia region's Jewish community is making plans for a new congregation after a half-century with no formal gathering.

There have been Jewish people here in the communities of the Columbia estuary and surrounding beaches for a long time, though obviously never to the same extent as on the Eastern Seaboard or even Portland. As with everyone else in the baby boom generation, nowadays some come to live near the ocean and partake in retirement living. Others carry on entrepreneurial activities and are deeply intertwined in coastal life: Sol Sharin of Long Beach, Wash., springs to mind. He was a furniture dealer, exalted ruler of the Long Beach Elks and a generous contributor to countless good causes.

Astoria has had three notable Jewish mayors: Isaac Bergman, Herman Wise and Harry Steinbock. John Goodenberger wrote a cameo of Mayor Wise that appears in Astorians: Eccentric and Extraordinary.

Local Jewish people themselves are best qualified to speak about whether they have encountered prejudice or welcoming attitudes here. Certainly the U.S. has been both a bastion of safety and a home to pernicious bias. But it is nice to think that the West Coast is more inclined to judge people on their own merits and not because of ridiculous historical stereotypes.

## With crisis at the door, Congress leaves town

*Federal lawmakers are an irresponsible and privileged class*

Here is the speech Jeff Merkley or Ron Wyden should have delivered on the floor of the U.S. Senate before its recess last week.

"Mr. President: I rise to note that we and our House colleagues are leaving town while pressing business remains unfinished. We all know that funding for the Department of Homeland Security has not been secured past the end of this month. We know there is a gap between what the House has passed and what the Senate has done. We also all know that only four legislative days remain to resolve this before the Department of Homeland Security runs out of funds.

"Mr. President: What must Americans think of us — leaving our offices at the heart of our government here in Washington before the work is done? That is a choice the average working American does not have."

In those words Wyden or Merkley would have laid out for their colleagues why the House and Senate have become national embarrassments.

The basic disconnect between the legislative branch and the rest of America is work schedule. Most of us out here show up for work, and we are

Creation of the Beit Salmon Congregation here, besides generating a smile at the embedded nod to our region's totemic fish, stands in pleasant contrast to horrific events in Paris and Copenhagen in recent weeks that have included targeted attacks on Jewish people. This in turn sparked controversial statements by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu urging Jews to make a "mass migration" from Europe to Israel.

Especially in light of the Holocaust a scant seven decades ago, the murders of Jews because of their religion or ethnicity provokes a visceral repulsion among all good people. Part of this reaction ought to include enthusiastic endorsement of Jewish people feeling comfortable and welcomed wherever they choose to live. It would be a victory for hatred if too many feel compelled to relocate to Israel.

"If the way we deal with terror is to run somewhere else, we should all run to a deserted island," Denmark's chief rabbi said in the aftermath of the Copenhagen murders.

The ancient traditions of Judaism will enrich the cultural fabric of the lower Columbia.

expected to complete our tasks. Why should we have empathy for our national legislators who leave town with essential work incomplete.

They will tell us that this time to visit with constituents is valuable. And so it is. But the job of legislators gets done within the confines of the two legislative chambers.

Adding insult to all of this was House Speaker John Boehner's statement on Sunday that he was fine with shutting down the Department of Homeland Security.

How irresponsible. *The Washington Post* last Friday described the fix that Republicans are in by playing a game of intramural chicken, with the Homeland Security Department as the hostage — so soon after taking control of the House and Senate and pledging no government shutdowns.

Congress' vacation in the midst of government turmoil emphasizes the gap between our world and that inhabited by congressmen and senators. We know that in terms of pay and pensions they are a privileged class. What's galling is that our federal lawmakers are becoming an *irresponsible* and privileged class.

# Call off the Clintons' dogs

By MAUREEN DOWD

*New York Times News Service*

WASHINGTON — I'll pay for this column.

The Rottweilers will be unleashed.

Once the Clintons had a War Room. Now they have a Slime Room.

Once they had the sly James Carville, fondly known as "serpent-head." Now they have the slippery David Brock, accurately known as a snake.

Brock fits into the Clinton tradition of opportunistic knife-fighters like Dick Morris and Mark Penn.

The silver-haired 52-year-old, who sports colorful designer suits and once wore a monocle, brawled his way into a *Times* article about the uneasy marriage between Hillary Clinton's veteran attack dogs and the group of advisers who are moving over from Obamaland.

Hillary hasn't announced a 2016 campaign yet. She's busy polling more than 200 policy experts on how to show that she really cares about the poor while courting the banks. Yet her shadow campaign is already in a déjà-vu-all-over-again shark fight over control of the candidate and her money. It's the same old story: The killer organization that, even with all its ruthless hired guns, can't quite shoot straight.

Squabbling competing factions helped Hillary squander a quarter-of-a-billion dollars in 2008.

As Nicholas Confessore and Amy Chozick chronicled, the nasty dispute spilled into public and Brock resigned last week from the board of a pro-Clinton super PAC called Priorities USA Action — whose co-chairman is Jim Messina, Obama's 2012 campaign manager — accusing the political action committee of "an orchestrated political hit job" and "the kind of dirty trick I've witnessed in the right-wing and would not tolerate then."

He should know.

The former "right-wing hit man," and impresario of "dirty tricks," as Brock has said of himself, made his living in the '90s sliming Anita Hill as "a little bit

## The ongoing kaffeeklatsch on race

By CHARLES M. BLOW

*New York Times News Service*

In our collective imaginations, we tend to conceive of the constantly called-for "national conversation on race" as having the formality of some grand conclave of consciousness — an American Truth and Reconciliation equivalent, a spiritual spectacle in which sins are confessed and blame taken and burdens lifted.

This may be ideal, but it is also exceedingly unlikely in this country, particularly in this political environment.

There will be no great atoning. Reparations will not be paid. There will no sprawling absolution.

Yet we can still have a productive conversation. Indeed, I would argue that we are in the midst of a national conversation about race at this very moment. Its significance isn't drawn from structure but from the freedom of its form.

Every discussion over a backyard fence or a cup of coffee is part of that conversation. It is the very continuity of its casualness that bolsters its profundity.

We need to stop calling for the conversation and realize that we are already having it.

Last week the FBI director, James Comey, added his voice to that conversation, particularly as it relates to the relationship between law enforcement and communities of color. There were portions I found particularly potent coming from a man in his position.

He gave a list of "hard truths," the first of which was an admission that the history of law enforcement in this country was not only part of the architecture of oppression but also a



AP Photo/Jason DeCrow  
Former Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton speaks after accepting the Robert F. Kennedy Ripple of Hope Award during a ceremony, Dec. 16 in New York.

*Hillary is likely to raise, and more important, spend more than \$1 billion on her campaign.*

nutty and a little bit slutty" and breaking the Troopergate story, which accused Arkansas state troopers of setting up liaisons for Bill Clinton and spurred Paula Jones' 1994 sexual harassment lawsuit.

He has tried to discredit anyone who disagreed with his ideological hits (myself and reporters I know included). And that's still the business he's in, simply on the other side as a Hillary zealot. (His conversion began in 1996 when he published a biography of Hillary that was not a total hit job and that began the thaw.)

Just as Bill Clinton was able to forgive another architect of the vast right-wing conspiracy, Richard Mellon Scaife, once Scaife was charmed by Hillary in person and began giving money to the Clinton foundation, so, too, was Bill won over by Brock's book, "Blinded by the Right: The Conscience of an Ex-Conservative," and Brock's Media Matters and Correct the Record websites, which ferociously push back against any Hillary coverage that isn't fawning.

With the understood blessing of the Clintons, Brock runs a \$28 million cluster of media monitoring groups and oppo research organizations that are vehicles to rebut and at times discredit and threaten

brutal tool of that system. As Comey put it, "One reason we cannot forget our law enforcement legacy is that the people we serve and protect cannot forget it, either."

His second hard truth acknowledged the existence of unconscious racial bias "in our white-majority culture" and how that influences policing.

Third, he acknowledged that people in law enforcement can develop "different flavors of cynicism" that can be "lazy mental shortcuts," resulting in more pronounced racial profiling.

But as in all discussions, there were portions of the speech to which I took exception.

First, Comey seems to falsely conflate condemnation of poor policing — sometimes predatory policing, in particular — with a condemnation of all policing. He makes a straw man argument, "Law enforcement is not the root cause of problems in our hardest hit neighborhoods." Who said it was?

This is a twisting of motive and purpose of the voices of recent protesters that undermines and mischaracterizes both. Minority communities want policing the same as any other, but they want it to be appropriate and proportional. They want not to be afraid of the cops as well as the criminals. They want officers to display an equitable modicum of discernment in treating the law-abiding differently from the lawbreaking.

The discussion is not about police officers being a "root cause of problems" in a given neighborhood, but rather that they shouldn't be a problem at all, anywhere. We can not geographically confine. We can move in and out of high-crime neighborhoods. We can't move in and out of our own skin.

anyone who casts a gimlet eye at Clinton Inc.

As Confessore and Chozick wrote, he uses a fundraiser named Mary Pat Bonner, whose firm has collected millions of dollars in commissions — a practice many fundraising experts consider unethical.

Everyone wants to be at the trough for this one because Hillary is likely to raise, and more important, spend more than \$1 billion on her campaign.

The Clinton crowd is trying to woo Brock back into the fold because he's good at getting money and knows how their enemies think. The Clintons appreciate the fact that Brock, like Morris, is a take-no-prisoners type with the ethical compass of a jackal. Baked in the tactics of the right, Brock will never believe that negative coverage results from legitimate shortcomings. Instead, it's all personal, all false, and all a war.

This is a bad harbinger for those who had hoped that Hillary would "kill off the wild dogs," as one Obama loyalist put it, and Bill would leave behind the sketchy hangers-on in the mold of Ron Burkle and Jeffrey Epstein.

Hillary's inability to dispense with brass-knuckle, fanatical acolytes like Brock shows that she still has an insecure streak that requires Borgia-like blind loyalty, and can't distinguish between the real vast right-wing conspiracy and the voices of legitimate concern.

Money-grubbing is always the ugly place with the Clintons, who have devoured \$2.1 billion in contributions since 1992 to their political campaigns, family foundation and philanthropies, according to *The Old (Good) New Republic*.

David Axelrod, the author of a new memoir, *Believer*, wrote that Hillary's past gurus, Morris and Penn, were nonbelievers — mercenary, manipulative and avaricious. He told Politico's Glenn Thrush that he would have advised Hillary not to cash in with her book and six-figure speeches.

Axelrod reiterated to me that Hillary's designated campaign chairman, John Podesta, Bill Clinton's last chief of staff who left his post as an Obama counselor Friday, "has the strength and standing to enforce a kind of campaign discipline that hasn't existed before."

But, for now, what Republicans say about government is true of the Clintons: They really do believe that your money belongs to them.

Someday, they should give their tin cup to the Smithsonian. It's one of the wonders of the world.



Charles Blow

At another point, Comey states that cynicism "becomes almost irresistible and maybe even rational by some lights." This is dangerous and unconditionally false. "Lazy mental shortcuts" — in other words, racial profiling — isn't rational in any light. It violates not only an American principle but also a human one: that no person should be punished for the crimes or sins of another.

His fourth hard truth focused on how crimes among "many young men of color become part of that officer's life experience." But in seeking to offer context, he mentioned "environments lacking role models, adequate education, and decent employment." Here he moves perilously close to a racial pathology argument, as if there were something inherent in blackness and black culture that predisposes one to criminality. This, too, is a "lazy mental shortcut."

What too few people mention when discussing crime is the degree to which concentrated poverty, hopelessness and despair are the chambermaids of violence and incivility. These factors are developed and maintained through a complicated interplay of structural biases — historical and current — interpersonal biases, environmental reinforcements and personal choices.

Even as I disagree on portions, I take the larger point, and I applaud the endeavor and its purpose. Comey seems to be making a genuine effort to be part of the conversation and the solution, and that is more than I can say for some.

One doesn't have to possess the certitude of gospel to have a positive impact on this discussion — for themselves and others. Just an earnest desire for insight and mutual understanding.

This is more than one can say of the hard of heart, those resistant to engagement and, therefore, beyond enlightenment. The stone cannot absorb no matter how much you drench it.