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Seeing Astoria through their eyes

The bounty of cruise ships begins

It is still a thrill to see a gleaming white tall cruise ship cross the Columbia River bar, traverse the shipping channel and dock at the Port of Astoria. After many years of hosting cruise ships in spring and fall, Astorians greeted the day visitors with extraordinary hospitality. It was a good day for museums, shops and restaurants.

If this were a year-round thing, as cruise ship traffic is in certain tropical places, this might all become predictable. But the cruise ship shoulder seasons — as ships move between the southern routes and the Alaska trade — provide a bright accent to life at the mouth of the Columbia River.

The cruise ships are a perfect jolt to our tourism. Thousands of visitors arrive, but not in cars. At day's end, they leave. The Port of Astoria gains much-needed revenue from moorage fees.

If you have traveled by cruise ship, you know that Astoria is not the usual port. For one thing, Astorians are not jaded. The town is eminently walkable. Some cruise ship passengers have been seen walking up Coxcomb Hill to the Astoria Column. Astoria is a real place, with a storied past. Nearby is one of the icons of the West, Fort Clatsop.



JOSHUA BESSEX — *The Daily Astorian*
The Crown Princess is one of the many cruise ships that will dock in Astoria this year. It arrived Thursday.

The Astoria Cruise Ship Hosts do yeoman's work in preparing for these visits — 18 this year — setting up shuttle bus stops and virtually escorting the day visitors.

Among the many changes that have made Astoria a more vital place, the cruise ship traffic has been an unexpected boost. Best of all this bounty of visitors in spring and fall allows us to see our place through their eyes.

North Coast has major homeless population

Look at a map of homelessness in the U.S. (tinyurl.com/p23ox4k) and a geographical pattern is instantly apparent. The problem is most acute on the West Coast including Hawaii, plus New York state and Massachusetts. Alaska and Vermont also have comparatively high percentages of homeless people, somewhat belying their reputations for rugged self-reliance.

Some usual poverty hot spots get off easy in this analysis, with perennial underdog Mississippi having the least homelessness in the nation, at just 74 per 100,000 residents.

Oregon is near the top of the homelessness Top 10, with the fifth-highest proportion — 306 per 100,000 resident lack a home. Hawaii is first with 487, New York second with 408, followed by Nevada, 372, and Massachusetts, 315. In sixth place behind Oregon in California, 294, Washington, 261, Vermont, 249, Alaska, 242, and Maine, 205. All these 2014 estimates are based on federal data.

There actually is some good news behind these statistics. In Oregon's case, we can take some comfort in a 31 percent decline in homelessness between 2007 and 2014. The rate fell by 21 percent in Washington, 18 percent in California and 16 percent in Nevada. It rose in all the other Top-10 states — by 51 percent in Vermont and 40 percent in Massachusetts, for example.

There are several explanations for these distinct regional differences. Housing in Mississippi is inexpensive — though also often substandard — and the expenditures on utilities and other components related to housing are also relatively low. Housing in

Oregon, at least in our most populous northwest corner, tends to be quite expensive. The *Portland Tribune* and other Portland news media have recently been reporting on declining housing availability and rising costs that are driving new construction into increasingly remote suburbs.

Astoria and the North Coast also are seeing increases in home prices, along with significant homelessness in relation to our population. In 2014,

What can be done to help alleviate this problem, which is damaging to those directly impacted and to society? Portland is advocating for a bill in the current Legislature that would give cities the ability to work with developers to encourage more affordable housing units in new construction.

The online news source Vox meanwhile reports that in some setting the most effective answer is to simply give homeless people a permanent place to live. In Utah, which has a homeless rate of 105 per 100,000, a state program costing between \$10,000 and \$12,000 per person puts roofs over the heads of chronically homeless people. This compares to \$20,000 in public costs to care for and treat homeless people on the street. In Florida, the annual cost of homelessness was pegged at \$31,000 per person for law enforcement, jails, hospital care and other services.

Bearing in mind long-term community concerns about not rolling out a welcome wagon for new homeless people, we must pay more attention to getting our problem under control. Otherwise, as more people move to Oregon, the progress we have made will surely disappear.

The nature of urban poverty

By DAVID BROOKS
New York Times News Service

Lately it seems as though every few months there's another urban riot and the nation turns its attention to urban poverty.

And in the midst of every storm, there are people crying out that we should finally get serious about this issue.

This time it was Jon Stewart who spoke for many when he said: "And you just wonder sometimes if we're spending a trillion dollars to rebuild Afghanistan's schools, like, we can't build a little taste down Baltimore way. Like is that what's really going on?"

The audience applauded loudly, and it's a nice sentiment, but it's not really relevant.

The problem is not lack of attention, and it's not mainly lack of money. Since 1980 federal anti-poverty spending has exploded. As Robert Samuelson of *The Washington Post* has pointed out, in 2013 the federal government spent nearly \$14,000 per poor person. If you simply took that money and handed it to the poor, a family of four would have a household income roughly twice the poverty rate.

Yet over the past 30 years the poverty rate has scarcely changed.

In addition, U.S. public spending on schools is high by global standards. As Peter Wehner pointed out in *Commentary*, in 2011 Baltimore ranked second among the nation's largest 100 school districts in how much it spent per pupil, \$15,483 per year.

The Sandtown-Winchester area of Baltimore, where Freddie Gray lived, has not lacked for attention either. In the late 1980s, Baltimore's then-mayor, Kurt Schmoke, decided

he would make the neighborhood a model of urban restoration. He gathered public and private actors like developer James Rouse and Habitat for Humanity. They raised more than \$130 million and poured it into new homes, new school curricula, new job training programs and new health care centers. Townhouses were built for \$87,000 and sold to residents for \$37,000.

The money was not totally wasted. By 2000, the poverty rate in the area had dropped by 4.4 percent. The share of residents who lived in owner-occupied homes had risen by 8.3 percent, according to a thorough study by The Abell Foundation. But the area was not transformed. Today there are no grocery stores in the neighborhood and no restaurants. Crime is rampant. Unemployment is high.

Despite all these efforts, there are too many young men leading lives like the one that Gray led. He was apparently a kind-hearted, respectful, popular man, but he was not

on the path to upward mobility. He won a settlement for lead paint poisoning. According to *The Post*, his mother was a heroin addict who, in a deposition, said she couldn't read. In one court filing, it was reported that Gray was four grade levels behind in reading. He was arrested more than a dozen times.

It is wrong to say federal efforts to tackle poverty have been a failure. The \$15 trillion spent by the government over the past half-century has improved living standards and eased burdens for millions of poor people. But all that money and all those experiments have not integrated people who live in areas of concentrated poverty into the mainstream economy. Often, the money has served as a



David Brooks

cushion, not a ladder.

Saying we should just spend more doesn't really cut it. What's needed is a phase shift in how we think about poverty. Renewal efforts in Sandtown-Winchester prioritized bricks and mortar. But the real barriers to mobility are matters of social psychology, the quality of relationships in

a home and a neighborhood that either encourage or discourage responsibility, future-oriented thinking and practical ambition.

Jane Jacobs once wrote that a healthy neighborhood is like a ballet, a series of intricate interactions in which people are regulating each other and encouraging certain behaviors.

In a fantastic interview that David Simon of *The Wire* gave to Bill Keller for *The Marshall Project*, he describes that, even in poorest Baltimore, there once were informal rules of behavior governing how cops interacted with citizens — when they'd drag them in and when they wouldn't, what curse words you could say to a cop and what you couldn't. But then the code dissolved. The informal guardrails of life were gone, and all was arbitrary harshness.

That's happened across many social spheres — in schools, families and among neighbors. Individuals are left without the norms that middle-class people take for granted. It is phenomenally hard for young people in such circumstances to guide themselves.

Yes, jobs are necessary, but if you live in a neighborhood, as Gray did, where half the high school students don't bother to show up for school on a given day, then the problems go deeper.

The world is waiting for a thinker who can describe poverty through the lens of social psychology. Until the invisible bonds of relationships are repaired, life for too many will be nasty, brutish, solitary and short.

The real barriers to mobility are matters of social psychology.

Men wielding power in hellish times

By CHARLES KRAUTHAMMER
Washington Post Writers Group

WASHINGTON — *Wolf Hall*, the Man Booker Prize-winning historical novel about the court of Henry VIII — and most dramatically, the conflict between Thomas Cromwell and Sir Thomas More — is now a TV series (presented on PBS).

It is maddeningly good.

Maddening because its history is tendentiously distorted, yet the drama is so brilliantly conceived and executed that you almost don't care. Faced with an imaginative creation of such brooding, gripping, mordant intensity, you find yourself ready to pay for it in historical inaccuracy.

And *Wolf Hall's* revisionism is breathtaking. It inverts the conventional view of the saintly More being undone by the corrupt, amoral, serpentine Cromwell, the king's chief minister. This is fiction as polemic. Author Hilary Mantel, an ex- and anti-Catholic ("the Catholic Church is not an institution for respectable people"), has set out to rehabilitate Cromwell and defenestrate More, most especially the More of Robert Bolt's beautiful and hagiographic *A Man for All Seasons*.

Who's right? Neither fully, though *Wolf Hall's* depiction of More as little more than a cruel heretic-burning hypocrite is particularly provocative, if not perverse. To be sure, More-worship is somewhat overdrawn, as even the late Cardinal Francis George warned at a 2012 convocation of bishops. More had his flaws. He may have been a man for all seasons, but he was also a man of his times. And in those times of merciless contention between Rome and the Reformation, the pursuit and savage persecution of heresy were the norm.

Indeed, when Cromwell achieved power, he persecuted Catholics with a zeal and thoroughness that surpassed even More's persecution of Protestants. *Wolf Hall's* depiction of Cromwell as a man of great sensitivity and deep feeling is, therefore, even harder to credit. He was cruel and cunning, quite monstrous both in pursuit of personal power and



Photo courtesy of PBS

Damian Lewis plays Henry VIII in the PBS series "Wolf Hall."

wealth, and in serving the whims and wishes of his royal master.

Nonetheless, Cromwell's modern reputation will be enhanced by Mark Rylance's brilliant and sympathetic cinematic portrayal, featuring a stillness and economy of expression that is at once mesmerizing and humanizing. The nature of the modern audience helps too. In this secular age beset by throat-slashing religious fanatics, we are far more disposed to despise excessive piety and celebrate the pragmatic, if ruthless, modernizer.

Which Cromwell was, as the chief engineer of Henry's Reformation. He crushed the Roman church, looted the monasteries and nationalized faith by subordinating clergy to king. That may flatter today's reflexive anti-clericalism. But we do well to remember that the centralized state Cromwell helped midwife did prepare the ground, over the coming centuries, for the rise of the rational, willful, thought-controlling, indeed all-controlling, state.

It is perhaps unfair to call Cromwell (and Henry) proto-totalitarian, as some critics have suggested, essentially blaming them for what came after. But they did sow the seed. And while suppressing one kind of intolerance, they did little more than redefine heresy as an offense against the sovereignty not of God but of the state.

However, *Wolf Hall* poses questions not just political but literary. When such a distortion of history produces such a wonderfully suc-

cessful piece of fiction, we are forced to ask: What license are we to grant to the historical novel?

For all the learned answers, in reality it comes down to temporal proximity. If the event is in the recent past, you'd better be accurate. Oliver Stone's paranoid and libelous *JFK* will be harmless in 50 years, but it will take that long for the stench to dissipate. On the other hand, does anyone care that Shakespeare diverges from the record (such as it is) in his Caesar or Macbeth or his Henrys?

Time turns them to legend. We don't feel it much matters anymore. There is the historical Caesar and there is Shakespeare's Caesar. They live side by side.

The film reviewer Stanley Kauffmann said much the same about David Lean's *Lawrence of Arabia* vs. the real T.E. Lawrence. They diverge. Accept them each on their own terms, as separate and independent realities. (After all, Lawrence's own account, *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, offers magnificent prose but quite unreliable as well.)

So with the different versions of More and Cromwell. Let them live side by side. *Wolf Hall* is utterly compelling, but I nonetheless refuse to renounce *A Man For All Seasons*. I'll live with both Mores, both Cromwells. After all, for centuries we've accepted that light is both wave and particle. If physics can live with maddening truths, why can't literature and history?

When Cromwell achieved power, he persecuted Catholics with a zeal.