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What's going on Heritage Square?

*In cleaning up contaminated sites,
Astoria's high card is the Mill Pond*

Contaminated soil is a headache for developers. Hazardous sites are also a frequent reality. Thus cities must be prepared to deal with them.

Astoria has been successful in dealing with brownfield sites. The most prominent example is the Mill Pond, which was built on the site of the bankrupt Astoria Plywood Cooperative. The plywood mill site was a nightmare of environmental contamination and financial liens. In the face of that challenge, city management and the City Council slowly and deliberately worked its way through that minefield in the 1990s.

The city's current challenge is the hole in the ground at Heritage Square. The hole occurred in 2010 when the slab of the former Safeway store cratered. Astorians are rightly impatient at the sight of the hole. It shouts to be filled. Meanwhile, the hole also raises the issue of the site's contamination. One of the block's prior residents was a predecessor of this newspaper.

As Derrick DePledge reported in last Thursday's edition, the state Department of Environmental Quality and the city are engaged in learning more about what's in the dirt. City Manager Brett Estes displayed awareness that citizens want to see progress and some evidence of a solution.

In the drive to develop this block, Astoria's high card is the Mill Pond. That reclamation caught the eye of the national press. It put our city on the map in the financial and scientific world that tracks green projects. What that means is that Astoria has credibility when it comes to clean-up. Moreover, we have a reputation among regional funders for getting the job done.

The essential component will be the City Council's plans for Heritage Square. As DePledge reported, those concepts have changed over the years. Mayor Arline LaMear and councilors have mentioned the square as the site for a prospective mixed-use development that would include a library.

The thing about large renovation and restoration projects — such as the Mill Pond or the Liberty Theater — is that once they are complete, the public forgets the years that went into their success. We have no doubt that day will come for Heritage Square.

Meanwhile, it is essential that the City Council gives the rest of us a clear intention about what's going on the square.

Enough is enough

*Long Beach Fourth of July
was out of control*

It looks like Woodstock with a vast payload of pyrotechnics. A video shot from a drone aircraft a few hundred feet above Long Beach, Wash., the night of July 4 shows all anyone needs to know about the situation.

The beach is absolutely packed, innumerable aerial fireworks are going off within feet of tinder-dry beach grass, clouds of smoke drift east and partially obscure the town. It looks exciting — even beautiful in a way. But few would want our 10 year old down there dodging pickups, drunks and falling debris. (See www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z9tt7JCqFU)

Legendary as Woodstock was, it is no wonder the little New York town doesn't welcome a repeat each year. It didn't have policing, sanitation, parking or other facilities to accommodate such a throng of guests. Neither does the Long Beach Peninsula.

Some think as many as 100,000 people were on the Peninsula for the Independence Day weekend. Though this seems likely to be an overestimation, attendance was clearly beyond the capacity of a set of small communities with a total population of about 10,000. It was fortunate that a majority of visitors were either well behaved or confined misbehavior to the beach.

But a man lost his life under circumstances that are still murky, concealed in a thick haze of inebriation and chaos. There were other incidents that weren't quite so disturbing but which nevertheless shouldn't have a place on a civilized West Coast in 2015. South Pacific County isn't frontier Deadwood and isn't obliged to put up with loutish behavior.

With the exception of the well-staffed Long Beach Police Department, law enforcement and other emergency responders are largely in a position of simply hoping for the best when it comes to July Fourth. The far

more law-abiding Rod Run crowd has sometimes been made to feel they are in a minimum-security prison, when it is obvious that priorities must be reversed to regain control of the July Fourth beach. By statute a portion of the beach is defined as a Washington state highway. It is time for the Washington State Patrol to live up to its responsibilities and position enough personnel here for the holiday to make certain laws are obeyed and homicides can't occur with impunity.

Garbage, too, is out of hand. A program of handing out trash bags at beach approaches has been smart and partially effective. The Grassroots Garbage Gang, Coast Savers and other volunteers who pick up the bulk of the wreckage are owed a thousand thanks. However, it is time to dramatically ramp up law enforcement. State troopers circulating through the crowd handing out littering tickets would have a considerable impact.

For decades, fickle weather and remoteness encouraged business owners and town leaders on the peninsula — and the North Coast — to try to pack as many tourists as possible into the peak season between July Fourth and Labor Day. This was understandable. And every future year isn't likely to be as sunny and busy as this one.

But the Long Beach Peninsula Visitors Bureau is quite right in shifting our marketing focus away from bringing people in during months when the beach is automatically popular. It is time to ramp up out-of-area publicity about our astounding scenery, wildlife, amazing food, art, culture and deep history. Lodging tax distributions should be adjusted to reflect this priority.

None of this means ending July Fourth festivities. But it must return to something that feels safe and welcoming to family members of all ages. The beach cannot serve as a dump and cesspit for thousands of disrespectful partiers.

Liberals and wages

By PAUL KRUGMAN
New York Times News Service

Hillary Clinton gave her first big economic speech Monday, and progressives were by and large gratified. For Clinton's core message was that the federal government can and should use its influence to push for higher wages.

Conservatives, however — at least those who could stop chanting “Benghazi! Benghazi! Benghazi!” long enough to pay attention — seemed bemused. They believe that Ronald Reagan proved that government is the problem, not the solution. So wasn't Clinton just reviving defunct “paleoliberalism”? And don't we know that government intervention in markets produces terrible side effects?

No, she wasn't, and no, we don't. In fact, Clinton's speech reflected major changes, deeply grounded in evidence, in our understanding of what determines wages. And a key implication of that new understanding is that public policy can do a lot to help workers without bringing down the wrath of the invisible hand.

Many economists used to think of the labor market as being pretty much like the market for anything else, with the prices of different kinds of labor — that is, wage rates — fully determined by supply and demand. So if wages for many workers have stagnated or declined, it must be because demand for their services is falling.

In particular, the conventional wisdom attributed rising inequality to technological change, which was raising the demand for highly educated workers while devaluing blue-collar work. And there was nothing much policy could do to change the trend, other than aiding low-wage workers via subsidies like the earned-income tax credit.

You still see commentators who

haven't kept up invoking this story as if it were obviously true. But the case for “skill-biased technological change” as the main driver of wage stagnation has largely fallen apart. Most notably, high levels of education have offered no guarantee of rising incomes — for example, wages of recent college graduates, adjusted for inflation, have been flat for 15 years.

Meanwhile, our understanding of wage determination has been transformed by an intellectual revolution — that's not too strong a word — brought on by a series of remarkable studies of what happens when governments change the minimum wage.

More than two decades ago the economists David Card and Alan



Paul Krugman

found, if anything, a positive effect. Their result has since been confirmed using data from many episodes. There's just no evidence that raising the minimum wage costs jobs, at least when the starting point is as low as it is in modern America.

How can this be? There are several answers, but the most important is probably that the market for labor isn't like the market for, say, wheat, because workers are people. And because they're people, there are important benefits, even to the employer, from paying them more: better morale, lower turnover, increased productivity. These benefits largely offset the direct effect of higher labor costs, so that raising the minimum wage needn't cost jobs after all.

The direct takeaway from this intellectual revolution is, of course, that we should raise minimum wages. But there are broader implications, too: Once you take what we've learned from minimum-wage studies seriously, you realize that they're not relevant just to the lowest-paid workers.

For employers always face a trade-off between low-wage and higher-wage strategies — between, say, the traditional Wal-Mart model of paying as little as possible and accepting high turnover and low morale, and the

Costco model of higher pay and benefits leading to a more stable workforce. And there's every reason to believe that public policy can, in a variety of ways — including making it easier for workers to organize — encourage more companies to choose the good-wage strategy.

So there was a lot more behind Clinton's speech than I suspect most commentators realized. And for those trying to play gotcha by pointing out that some of what she said differed from ideas that prevailed when her husband was president, well, many liberals have changed their views in response to new evidence. It's an interesting experience; conservatives should try it some time.

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Listening to Ta-Nehisi Coates while white

By DAVID BROOKS
New York Times News Service

Dear Ta-Nehisi Coates, The last year has been an education for white people. There has been a depth, power and richness to the African-American conversation about Ferguson, Baltimore, Charleston and the other killings that has been humbling and instructive.

Your new book, “Between the World and Me,” is a great and searing contribution to this public education. It is a mind-altering account of the black male experience. Every conscientious American should read it.

There is a pervasive physicality to your memoir — the elemental vulnerability of living in a black body in America. Outside African-American nightclubs, you write, “black people controlled nothing, least of all the fate of their bodies, which could be commandeered by the police; which could be erased by the guns, which were so profigate; which could be raped, beaten, jailed.”

Written as a letter to your son, you talk about the effects of pervasive fear. “When I was your age the only people I knew were black and all of them were powerfully, adamantly, dangerously afraid.”

But the disturbing challenge of your book is your rejection of the American dream. My ancestors chose to come here. For them, America was the antidote to the crushing restrictiveness of European life, to the pogroms. For them, the American dream was an uplifting spiritual creed that offered dignity, the chance to rise.

Your ancestors came in chains. In your book the dream of the comfortable suburban life is a “fairytale.” For you, slavery is the original American sin, from which there is no redemption. America is Egypt without the possibility of the Exodus. African-American men are

caught in a crushing logic, determined by the past, from which there is no escape.

You write to your son, “Here is what I would like for you to know: In America, it is traditional to destroy the black body — it is heritage.” The innocent world of the dream is actually built on the broken bodies of those kept down below.

If there were no black bodies to oppress, the affluent dreamers “would have to determine how to build their suburbs on something other than human bones, how to angle their jails toward something other than a human stockyard, how to erect a democracy independent of cannibalism.”

Your definition of “white” is complicated. But you write

Is my job just to respect your experience and accept your conclusions? Does a white person have standing to respond?

“White America’ is a syndicate arrayed to protect its exclusive power to dominate and control our bodies. Sometimes this power is direct (lynching), and sometimes it is insidious (redlining).” In what is bound to be the most quoted passage from the book, you write that you watched the smoldering towers of 9/11 with a cold heart. At the time you felt the police and firefighters who died “were menaces of nature; they were the fire, the comet, the storm, which could — with no justification — shatter my body.”

You obviously do not mean that literally today (sometimes in your phrasing you seem determined



David Brooks

to be misunderstood). You are illustrating the perspective born of the rage “that burned in me then, animates me now, and will likely leave me on fire for the rest of my days.”

I read this all like a slap and a revelation. I suppose the first obligation is to sit with it, to make sure the testimony is respected and sinks in. But I have to ask, Am I displaying my privilege if I disagree? Is my job just to respect your experience and accept your conclusions? Does a white person have standing to respond?

If I do have standing, I find the causation between the legacy of lynching and some guy's decision to commit a crime inadequate to the complexity of most individual choices.

I think you distort American history. This country, like each person in it, is a mixture of glory and shame. There's a Lincoln for every Jefferson Davis and a Harlem Children's Zone for every KKK — and usually vastly more than one. Violence is embedded in America, but it is not close to the totality of America.

In your anger at the tone of innocence some people adopt to describe the American dream, you reject the dream itself as flimflam. But a dream sullied is not a lie. The American dream of equal opportunity, social mobility and ever more perfect de-

mocracy cherishes the future more than the past. It abandons old wrongs and transcends old sins for the sake of a better tomorrow.

This dream is a secular faith that has unified people across every known divide. It has unleashed ennobling energies and mobilized heroic social reform movements. By dissolving the dream under the acid of an excessive realism, you trap generations in the past and destroy the guiding star that points to a better future.

Maybe you will find my reactions irksome. Maybe the right white response is just silence for a change. In any case, you've filled my ears unforgettably.