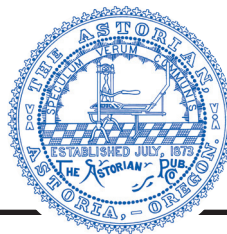


OPINION



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editor@dailyastorian.com

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KARI BORGEN
Publisher

DERRICK DePLEDGE
Editor

JEREMY FELDMAN
Circulation Manager

JOHN D. BRUIJN
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WRITER'S NOTEBOOK

We are all accountable

Between us, my wife and I have five great-great-grandfathers who fought in the Civil War to end slavery and preserve the Union. One died during the war. Two others died later from chronic ailments brought home from sadistic Confederate prisons.

Americans absolutely should remember the Civil War and its lessons. Alongside the genocide — both deliberate and accidental — of our continent's native peoples, the Civil War was the cruelest event in our history. Understanding the war's causes and effects can help guide us away from anything resembling the same mistakes, of which the biggest by far was turning a blind eye to the evils of slavery and white supremacy.



MATT WINTERS

It is scandalous to see Americans in 2020 standing up in defense of Confederate monuments and the Confederate battle flag. These are not wholesome tributes to shared misfortune or glorious defense of tradition. They are overt symbols of nostalgia for a racist past. We should no more countenance statues of Robert E. Lee and Ku Klux Klan

founder Nathan Bedford Forrest in public spaces than Germans would allow statues of Adolph Hitler's henchman Hermann Göring. They certainly are part of history. They are unworthy of any form of honor.

I couldn't care less whether some jackass keeps a framed Confederate flag above his fireplace or flies one from his pickup. But to hell with Lee and all the other racist scoundrels who tried to tear this country apart. Pull down their statues and consign their names to oblivion. I'm done being diplomatic about it.

Skin in the game

For a white West Coast newspaper editor to come out against today's neo-Confederates and their apologists is a low-risk gesture.

Not "no risk" — it's shocking how many Pacific Northwest residents deploy racist symbolism, at least sometimes as a provocative way to push back against urban elitists. But outright citizen-to-citizen violence toward other races and their defenders diminished in the wake of our lingering shame over Japanese American World War II internments.

The KKK, a toxic voice of anti-immigrant fervor in cities including Astoria and Bellingham in my grandfather's time, lost traction here by the 1930s. So I can condemn racism without much personal consequence.

But few of us, if we're willing to admit it, are very far from the stupid tribal prejudices and loutish rivalries that form the framework of systemic racism. Am I racist? I like to think not, though this is such a white-majority area it would be slightly challenging to find anyone to be actively racist against.

Not that lack of proximity to other races is any inoculation against bigotry. I'm mortified to say that 35 years ago I once sat around and laughed at disgusting racist jokes told by a high school friend who probably hadn't spent a cumulative hour in his life in the company of African Americans. Today, I hope he'd know



Winters family

Union veterans of the Civil War organized themselves in the Grand Army of the Republic. They would be surprised to find any acceptance of Confederate symbols in today's America.

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better, and that if he didn't, I'd stop him and walk away.

Being a racial minority in a nearly all-Native American primary school taught me that friendship is far more than skin deep, and that kids of every race have more to fear from grown-ups than from each other.

Courtesy, hospitality and curiosity greeted me there — and wherever I've gone in life, including traditional Quechua villages in the Andes and mosques on remote Muslim islands during the Gulf War. I must have seemed like a ridiculous alien. Perhaps racist jokes are

still told about me. Immunized by white privilege, I can complacently rejoice in good manners triumphing over bad taste. Others aren't so fortunate.

In the aftermath of the George Floyd slaying and protests, I see people assert that staying out of trouble with police simply requires obeying the law. Goodness knows, I've never had anything other than friendly and professional interactions with law officers, whom I genuinely respect for helping preserve the peace. Most are no more racist than I am — not very.

But for me to assume Black people have the same experience with police as I do would be ridiculous. It's obvious that many Blacks and Natives are arrested, killed, traumatized and imprisoned for little or no good reason. It must stop.

My racists

Kind and honest are the words that first spring to mind when thinking about my dad — along with strong, adventurous, smart and appallingly bad taste in music. A civic-minded small-town lawyer who spent World War II as an U.S. Army officer building roads to and through the Yukon, he was a solid member of the Greatest Generation.

So it hurts to say he also was a racist. Mostly, his racism wasn't outspoken like that of his brother-in-law, my well-loved Uncle Frank, a Seattle grocer. Frank was flagrant about it — unreeling some groan-worthy generalization or falsehood about Blacks and then passing it off by saying, "Sure, I'm a racist. We all are. I'm just honest enough to admit to it."

Being a good guy in other respects is no guarantee that someone can perceive injustice. The anti-slavery Union side in the Civil War had its share of vicious bigots. The military as a whole struggled at least through Vietnam to overcome bias against nonwhites. Jews and other minorities also often faced steep hurdles to advancement. My dad was very much a member of the club and saw nothing wrong with how the system was rigged.

Heroic as dad was, I've learned he and other white officers and servicemen were astoundingly unfair to the thousands of African Americans who endured untold hardships while providing much of the labor and skill required for the Alaska Highway and Canol pipeline. This racism starts with neglect — the crucial role of Blacks in World War II's most monumental construction project has been nearly erased. Their work was undervalued at the time and their sacrifices taken for granted then and forever.

In this and other ways, dad's attitudes toward Blacks revealed a fundamental lack of empathy or pity. They were, for him, too "other" to really bother about. It amounted to a sad diminishment — not of them, but of himself.

So it is for America today, struggling to find a path through to a future — a time when the assertion "everyone is created equal" is acted upon as a shared truth by us all. We won't get there by pretending a problem doesn't exist, or by blaming only the police for racial dirty work in which we all are complicit.

Matt Winters is editor of the Chinook Observer.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Consequences

Everyone knows the COVID-19 virus has created havoc with the economy. Commercial businesses have shut down or shortened their hours, laid off employees and in general just lost revenue. Some have even been forced to shut-ter completely.

This will lead to a government shortfall in tax revenue for all levels of government, from the federal down to cities and towns. Everyone seems to be affected.

Yet the Astorian reports on Astoria's cautious budget draft that "the city anticipates nearly \$409,000 increase in expenses, mostly in increased wages and benefits for staff, along with a full-time human resources position" ("Astoria plans \$46.9 million budget amid pandemic," The Astorian, June 2).

My question is if everyone must pay their share of the consequences, why does it appear that the Public Employees Retirement System isn't being affected?

WILLIAM BELL
Astoria

At what cost?

The Port of Astoria has my support because of its place as a driver of the local economy. But I have questions about one subject: At what cost do cruise ships hurt our community?

What about infrastructure expenses billed to the businesses and city which they visit; water and sewage and the electricity they use to charge their laptops, tablets and smartphones. How do they repay our city for what they take from us? Does the Port charge equitable fees to the cruise ship lines for the number of passengers and crew on board?

We in Astoria are feeling a bit of a pinch from the cruise companies' cancellations, but more so, are the Port, restaurants, shops and services here at the mouth of the Columbia.

Let's take a lesson from Ketchikan,

Alaska, which put all their eggs in one basket: the cruise ship companies. Now they are feeling the economic pandemic punishment of their limited perspective planning by ignoring more sustainable family wage jobs — such as website developers, social media strategists, computer technology, nursing informatics, etc. — and other family wage employment options.

Keeping perspective in all things during these strange times is one of the most heroic acts we can perform.

PAMELA MATTSON McDONALD
Astoria

Fatherhood

There was a time in my life when I was positioned to do incredible things, but I chose instead a path self-indulgence and self-destruction.

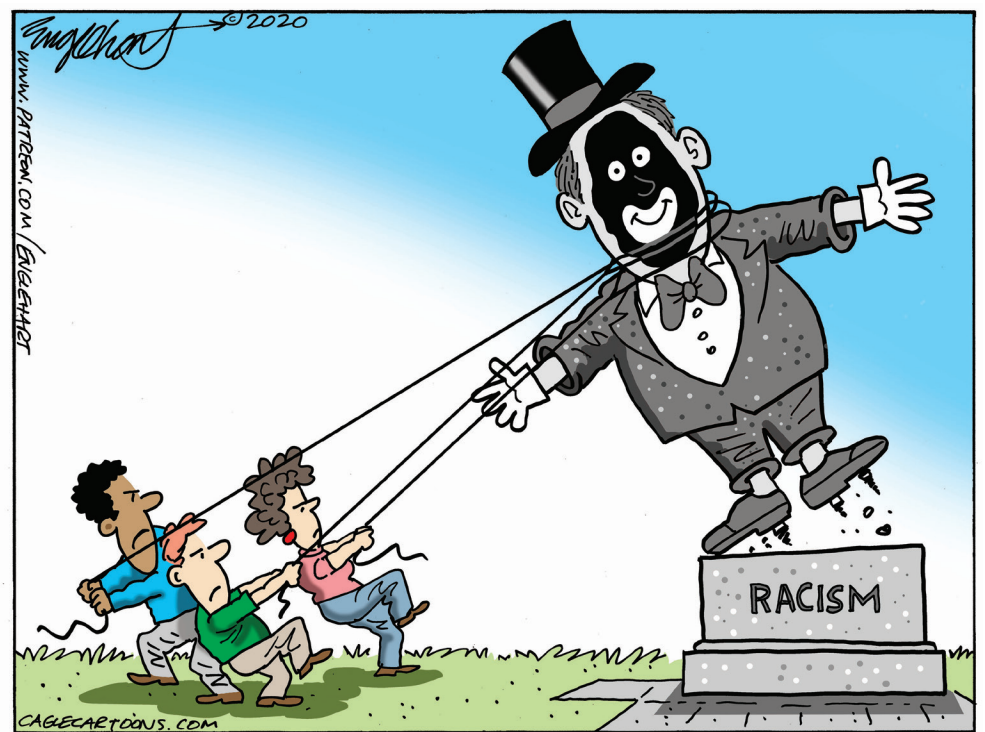
In my mid-30s I found love, and with it instant fatherhood. I suddenly had an 8-year-old boy who challenged me at every step, and a 6-year-old girl who needed a loving father figure in her life. I knew I had to be there for them, and try to never fail either of them.

Before they entered my life, if I crashed and burned, my only concern was that it be spectacular. Now, I had responsibility to someone other than myself. I didn't know how to be a dad. My father, a World War II survivor, was pretty much cold and distant, and left the child-rearing to my mom.

I promised myself that I would be a better dad than mine. Before long I had four children. Four distinct personalities with different needs for whom I had full responsibility. Despite my fumbling ineptitude, they somehow survived, both physically and emotionally.

If I had any success as a dad, it's because I truly loved these four, equally and without reservation.

So, on this Father's Day, I offer this: Whether you are a stepdad, a biological dad, or both, see no difference. Love them all the same. Remember always that they are counting on you. Embrace and cherish



that responsibility, as frightening as it may be. It is the most important work you will ever do in your lifetime.

BILL GRAFFIUS
Gearhart

Gratitude

A few days ago I was helping a neighbor clean out his basement of garbage. Being the talker I am, we lost track of time and got to the dump five minutes before they close.

As we pulled up to the weigh scales the customer service person looked at the clock, looked at us, looked back at the clock, then said, "You know we close in five minutes, right?" with a tone of disgust.

I have been in the customer service racket all my life, and the main thing that chaps my behind is anyone demeaning the ones who pay their salary. And it does not matter if that salary is paid by check or taxes. You work for the customer.

During this period of unemployment, when half the people we know are not getting a paycheck, this service person is

employed, and seems to not understand that there are at least 50 people who would love to take his place.

As we all move forward in our struggles of living, let us all try to have more gratitude for what we have to do to include each other.

TROY J. HASKELL
Astoria

Worth repeating

This is an awful man, waving a book he hasn't read, in front of a church he doesn't attend, invoking laws he doesn't understand, against fellow Americans he sees as enemies, wielding a military he dodged serving, to protect power he gained via accepting foreign interference, exploiting fear and anger he loves to stoke, after failing to address a pandemic he was warned about, and building it all on a bed of lies and childish inanity." — Rev. Robert Hendrickson, St. Philip's in the Hills Episcopal Church, Tucson, Arizona.

RICHARD McINTOSH
Astoria