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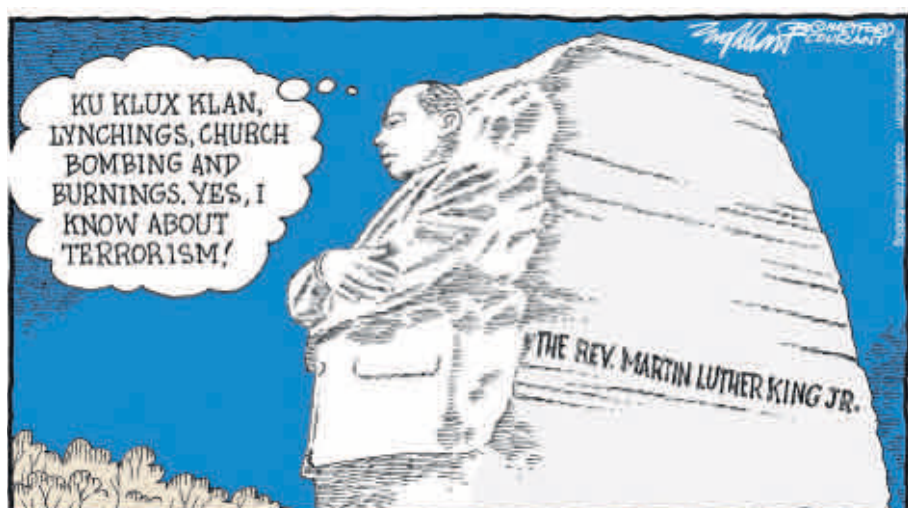
KATHRYN B. BROWN
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DANIEL WATTENBURGER
Managing Editor

JENNINE PERKINSON
Advertising Director

TIM TRAINOR
Opinion Page Editor

OUR VIEW



Martin Luther King Jr. still holds us accountable to Constitution's promise

Slavery was the ticking time bomb of America's Constitution. Thomas Jefferson knew it, when it awakened him "like a fire bell in the night." The bomb went off in the 1860s with the Civil War. Despite the Union victory and the 13th Amendment, America entered a long period of Jim Crow laws that made racial segregation a fact of life.

It is still hard for us in 2015 to imagine an America in which blacks traveling in many states could not find overnight accommodation, restaurants or restrooms. Part of the lore of every touring group of black musicians in the era was sleeping in their car. Widespread lynchings also were a theme.

In a most damnable manifestation, black World War II veterans returned to a segregated nation.

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., whose birth date we celebrated Monday, played a pivotal role in ending that era. His nonviolent campaigns throughout the South were captured on television. It led to a Southern president, Lyndon B. Johnson, moving a Civil Rights Act through Congress in 1964. That was followed by the Voting Rights Act.

King ended a debilitating way of

life. Just as slavery did not ennoble the slave owner, segregation corrupted the white people who enforced it.

Today's newspaper is filled with stories about Eastern Oregonians celebrating the life of King. It might seem strange for a place that has so few African-Americans to honor

the life and legacy of a black man born in inner-city Atlanta, but that's overlooking King's most important lesson: that every person's value is intrinsic.

As King said in his "I Have a Dream" speech, the U.S. Constitution and Declaration of Independence were a promissory note signed by our founding fathers to

every future citizen of the United States. As a nation we failed to make good on that promise for nearly two centuries. Even today we make people fight for equal rights instead of putting those who would withhold them on trial.

Dr. King's message was not just for black citizens. His message was for all Americans — and all mankind. It was a message about the basic promise our country makes to all kinds and classes of people. That promise of equality is the central promise of our republic.

King helped us remember it. We must never forget it.

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Unsigned editorials are the opinion of the East Oregonian editorial board of Publisher Kathryn Brown, Managing Editor Daniel Wattenburger, and Opinion Page Editor Tim Trainor. Other columns, letters and cartoons on this page express the opinions of the authors and not necessarily that of the East Oregonian.

OTHER VIEWS

Truth in cinema

I went Friday morning to see "Selma" and found myself watching it in a theater full of black teenagers. Thanks to donations, D.C. public school kids got free tickets to the first Hollywood movie about the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. on his birthday weekend — an effort that was duplicated for students around the country.

The kids did plenty of talking and texting, and plenty of fighting over whether there was too much talking and texting. Slowly but surely, though, the crowd was drawn in by the Scheherazade skills of the "Selma" director, Ava DuVernay.

The horrific scene of the four schoolgirls killed in the white supremacist bombing of a Birmingham, Alabama, church stunned the audience. One young man next to me unleashed a string of expletives and admitted that he was scared. When civil rights leaders are clubbed, whipped and trampled by white lawmen as feral white onlookers cheer, the youngsters seemed aghast.

In a delicately wrought scene in which Coretta Scott King calls out her husband about his infidelities, some of the teenage girls reacted with a chorus of "ooohs."

DuVernay sets the tone for her portrayal of Lyndon Johnson as patronizing and skittish on civil rights in the first scene between the president and King. LBJ stands above a seated MLK, pats him on the shoulder, and tells him "this voting thing is just going to have to wait" while he works on "the eradication of poverty."

Many of the teenagers by me bristled at the power dynamic between the men. It was clear that a generation of young moviegoers would now see LBJ's role in civil rights through DuVernay's lens.

And that's a shame. I loved the movie and find the Oscar snub of its dazzling actors repugnant. But the director's talent makes her distortion of LBJ more egregious. Artful falsehood is more dangerous than artless falsehood, because fewer people see through it.

DuVernay told Rolling Stone that, originally, the script was more centered on the LBJ-MLK relationship and was "much more slanted to Johnson."

"I wasn't interested in making a white-savior movie," she said.

Hollywood has done that with films like "Mississippi Burning," which cast white FBI agents as the heroes, or "Cry Freedom," which made a white journalist the focus rather than Denzel Washington's anti-apartheid activist, Steve Biko.

Instead of painting LBJ and MLK as allies, employing different tactics but complementing each other, the director made Johnson an obstacle.

Top Johnson aide Jack Valenti told Michael Beschloss, the presidential historian, that LBJ aspired to pass a Voting Rights Act from his first night as president. Valenti said that his boss talked to him about it the night of JFK's assassination in the bedroom of Johnson's house in D.C., The Elms, before the newly sworn-in president went to sleep.



MAUREEN DOWD
Comment

On the tape of a phone conversation between Johnson and King the week of LBJ's 1965 inauguration, the president said that he indicated the time was yet ripe to ask Congress for it, and he made it clear that they both needed to think of something that would move public opinion more than a presidential speech.

"Johnson was probably thinking, at least in part, of the spring of '63, when JFK was privately saying the public wasn't yet politically ready for a comprehensive civil rights bill," Beschloss said. "Then came the May 1963 photograph of Birmingham police setting dogs against African-American demonstrators, which helped to move many white Americans who were on the fence about the issue."

"Once Selma happened, LBJ was, of course, horrified, but he knew that the atrocity would have an effect on white Americans

similar to Birmingham that would make it easier for him to get a Voting Rights Act from Congress."

In an interview with Gwen Ifill on PBS, DuVernay dismissed the criticism by Joseph Califano Jr. and other LBJ loyalists, who said that the president did not resist the Selma march or let J. Edgar Hoover send a sex tape of her husband to Coretta King. (Bobby Kennedy, as JFK's attorney general, is the

one who allowed Hoover to tap King.)

"This is art; this is a movie; this is a film," DuVernay said. "I'm not a historian. I'm not a documentarian."

The "Hey, it's just a movie" excuse doesn't wash. Filmmakers love to talk about their artistic license to distort the truth, even as they bank on the authenticity of their films to boost them at awards season.

John Lewis, the Georgia congressman who was badly beaten in Selma, has said that bridge led to the Obama White House. And, on Friday night, the president offset the Oscar dis by screening "Selma" at the White House. Guests included DuVernay, Lewis and Oprah Winfrey, who acts in the film and was one of its producers.

There was no need for DuVernay to diminish LBJ, given that the Civil Rights Movement would not have advanced without him. Vietnam is enough of a pox on his legacy.

As I have written about "Lincoln," "Zero Dark Thirty" and "Argo," and as The New York Review of Books makes clear about "The Imitation Game," the truth is dramatic and fascinating enough. Why twist it? On matters of race — America's original sin — there is an even higher responsibility to be accurate.

DuVernay had plenty of vile white villains — including one who kicks a priest to death in the street — and they were no doubt shocking to the D.C. school kids. There was no need to create a faux one.

Maureen Dowd became a columnist on The New York Times Op-Ed page in 1995 after having served as a correspondent in the paper's Washington bureau since 1986. She has covered four presidential campaigns and served as White House correspondent.

Be heard!

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YOUR VIEWS

Thank you, Hermiston

It has been my pleasure and my privilege to have lived my life in Hermiston. I was born here and grew up with this town. My only time away was during college years and my time in the military service. I watched Hermiston grow and prosper beginning with farming and irrigation, the locating of the Umatilla Ordnance Depot and the construction of McNary Dam being major factors in its growth.

Easy access to highways and railways, good schools and a medical community, including a good hospital, a good city manager type of government and most of all good citizens involved in churches, civic clubs, chamber of commerce, fraternal organizations and volunteers stepping up whenever needed have made Hermiston become what is now, "the largest city in Eastern Oregon" and the only place I have ever wanted to live.

Our farming community, our neighboring cities of Echo, Irrigon, Pendleton, Stanfield and Umatilla, have worked well with us to create a pleasant lifestyle. I have enjoyed and take pride in having been involved with the success and livability of this area of Eastern Oregon. I will miss being "in the loop." Thank you everyone for the good wishes and kind words.

Thank you Hermiston for just being Hermiston. "Go Bulldogs!"

Frank Harkenrider ("Harkie")
Hermiston

Community colleges more than pay for themselves

The headline "College Won't Pay for Itself," in the January 16 *East Oregonian*,

was both misleading and incorrect. It was misleading because the focus of the article was on the opportunities and challenges posed by differing federal and state proposals to make community college essentially tuition-free for qualifying students. The headline was incorrect because taxpayers, students, and society at large have highly favorable returns on their investments in community colleges.

A September 2012 report, "The Economic Contribution of Oregon Community Colleges," by Economic Modeling Specialists, Inc., for the State of Oregon, outlines these favorable returns. Among them are higher earnings for students with associate's degrees, compared to students with a high school diploma or equivalent: the "average income at the career midpoint of an associate's degree graduate is \$41,600, 36% more than a student with a high school diploma."

The report also notes that "higher earnings that accrue to students of Oregon community colleges and associated increases in state income expand the tax base in Oregon by about \$692.9 million each year." And as students achieve higher education levels, they are less likely to engage in behaviors that cost the state money; the report states that "Oregon will see avoided social costs amounting to \$32.7 million per year due to Oregon community college students, including savings associated with improved health, reduced crime, and reduced welfare and unemployment." Overall, EMSI reported that for every dollar of their support "taxpayers see a cumulative return of \$2.30 over the course of students' working careers," and "state and local governments see a rate of return of 8.4 percent on their support of Oregon community colleges. This

return compares very favorably with private-sector rates of return on similar long-term investments."

Clearly, community colleges more than pay for themselves, for individual students, taxpayers, and society at large.

Susan E. Plass
Pendleton

Walden a champion of the GOP

Congressman Greg Walden, R-Oregon, made a stop in Pendleton on Saturday, where he had a town hall meeting at Blue Mountain Community College and a reception at Hamley's, which I was privileged to attend.

Over the years I have attended many events where he also attended, which includes the Dorchester conference, which is held every March in Seaside. This gathering of Republicans is attended by legislators and people from around Oregon that are discussing current issues. We were all concerned about ways that the smallest possible government would take care of our political needs.

Congressman Walden with visits and participation at such events over the years has developed an understanding that government can help Oregon with management of forests and agricultural needs. He also is current and has been chairman of the House committee that helps elect Republicans, which we need,

to counter the direction that our current president has taken us towards ever larger and more expensive government. We are fortunate to have such a representative in Congress with his background and interest to represent us and help us to elect Republicans.

That means we must help finance and elect politicians that may bring us back to the intentions of our original founders. We need to encourage people of all ages to participate with finances and participation in the political process.

Donald Peterson
Pendleton

'Honorable' Kropf's motives questionable

I saw the paid political ad by the "Honorable Jeff Kropf (Ret)" against Bill Hansell. The same "Honorable Jeff Kropf" who dropped out of his reelection campaign for state representative in 2006 after learning his on-air time as a radio host would require his radio station to grant free air time to his Democratic opponent.

It appears the "Honorable Jeff Kropf" has a history of attempting to "buy" his will locally through free radio time and now in far off Eastern Oregon through a full page political ad.

Carlisle Harrison
Hermiston

LETTERS POLICY

The East Oregonian welcomes original letters of 400 words or less on public issues and public policies for publication in the newspaper and on our website. The newspaper reserves the right to withhold letters that address concerns about individual services and products or letters that infringe on the rights of private citizens. Submitted letters must be signed by the author and include the city of residence and a daytime phone number. The phone number will not be published. Unsigned letters will not be published. Send letters to Managing Editor Daniel Wattenburger, 211 S.E. Byers Ave. Pendleton, OR 97801 or email editor@eastoregonian.com.