

O EAST OREGONIAN PINION

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OUR VIEW

#DeleteFacebook

Across the world, the hashtag #DeleteFacebook has been trending on Twitter, Google and, most ironically, on Facebook itself.

It is in immediate response to the news that Facebook allowed companies to steal data from its users (as many as 50 million), which was then fed to disreputable political groups with the aim to manipulate Facebook users and elections.

Facebook has plenty to answer for in this case. They knew the data was stolen years ago, but told no one — not even those users who had been compromised. They kept it quiet until the story broke publicly.

But the problem is bigger than dumb actions that failed to secure our data. Facebook must also answer for the online atmosphere they have created. Their company culture is to move fast and break things, then go back later to see what they must do to clean up the mess. And that culture has trickled down to the user experience. What used to be an online space for sharing life updates and baby photos has become a space for anger and vitriol, fake news and product placement. Trolls run amok. The most awful responses engender the most responses. It's a continual loop that builds anger and division.

As a media source with a robust Facebook following, it sometimes feels like we're feeding the rotten system. We have long ago stopped posting crime stories, where comment sections often spiral out of control, to our page. But we

pledge to do more. Or, rather, less.

We know that media has lost a lot of ground to Facebook. We feel it here at the *East Oregonian*, both in our advertising and newsroom departments. On the ad side, we know that online advertising is now an \$83 billion a year enterprise, but Google and Facebook gobble up almost 60 percent of that pie. Traditional media of all kinds supply the nutrients that the online community feeds on, but the middle men get the bulk of the benefit.

From the news side, more than half of our website visits come to us via Facebook, which means that's where most of our social media resources are spent. Twitter accounts for little more than 1 percent of our daily visits. (Incidentally, Kathy Aney's 2015 story about the former Rajneesh camp turned into a Young Life retreat property has been one of our top read stories of the last month. It is linked to the Wikipedia pages of Young Life and the Rajneesh).

We're not the only ones pulling back on Facebook. Elon Musk, a notable naysayer of Facebook and its CEO Mark Zuckerberg, shared the #DeleteFacebook hashtag. He deleted the Facebook pages for his many companies, such as Tesla and SpaceX. He said the company gives him "the willies."

Unfortunately we're not rich enough to pull off such a brash move, cutting the cord with an important but troubled driver of traffic. But we do plan to reduce our reliance on Facebook as an audience generator. We will limit our posts this



week on the site, and post fewer and fewer stories as the weeks go on.

We think it will be better for our bottom line, and also for the mental health of our readers. All our Facebook fans know it is no longer a place to have a civilized discussion. It has been dominated by the loudest, meanest, snarkiest, angriest voices from all sides of the political and social spectrum. And it's clear that the more time you spend away from Facebook, the happier, more productive, and better informed you are.

But to help support your mental sanity and our bottom line, we're asking you to visit www.eastoregonian.com more often and sign up for our daily newsletter. Our print readers get all the goodies delivered to their mailbox each day, but others who just scroll on Facebook miss the majority of our work. And if we are posting there less often, we don't want you to miss even more. In our newspaper and on

our website, we hope you find the news you're after and none of the bullies and trolls you encounter on Facebook.

Of course different opinions will be welcome. Our letters to the editors section remains vibrant both online and in print. Your thoughts are welcome and your feedback on the job we do will always be heard and considered.

But you can rest safe in knowing that you can read and comment on news without anyone sucking up your data, following your every move or harassing you on every post.

Because the crux of being alive in the modern world at this moment is that each time you use Facebook — or for that matter products from Google or Amazon or Apple — you are giving away your personal data. You are giving away a piece of your liberty.

Remember: If you don't pay for a product, you are the product.

OTHER VIEWS

In praise of privilege

I have to say, I loved the gun-control march I observed Saturday in Washington. The crowd was good-hearted, gracious, diverse and welcoming. At a time when trust in democracy is waning, everybody kept underlining their faith in our democratic system, that voting is the way to make change. There was no culture war nastiness, no hint of resentment. Hunters and farmers and vets were celebrated. There was no ill will toward anybody but the NRA.

Of course some of the student speakers were grandiose and pretentious. Most of us were like that when we were 18. But for all their talk of "revolution," at its heart, this march was about a series of sensible, practical and moderate reforms: restricting assault weapons, expanding background checks and similar measures.

Recently, it has seemed like the country is gyrating out of control, that extremism on one side is generating extremism on the other. But the march I saw was not extreme. It was a responsible moral answer to right a very specific wrong, gun violence. It struck me as a very characteristic burst of American moral passion.

The march passed what I have come to think of as The Privilege Test. One of the great privileges of life is to be born an American citizen. We are the lucky inheritors of the American Creed, built around freedom, equality, opportunity and democracy. There's no such thing as the French Creed or the Italian Creed but there is an American creed. As Richard Hofstadter famously put it, "It has been our fate as a nation not to have ideologies, but to be one."

Furthermore, we're the lucky inheritors of the system Madison, Jefferson and Hamilton built to reify that creed, the words Lincoln, King and others used to expand it. We're the inheritors of not just philosophical generalizations but of a very specific historical struggle — the legacy that Crispus Attucks, Nathan Hale and Sullivan Ballou left by dying for the creed; the legacy that Eugene Sledge, Frances Perkins, Bayard Rustin and a million immigrant ancestors left by suffering for it.

All we have to do is live up to this privilege of being American, to take our turn narrowing the gap between the American Creed, which binds us, and the American reality, which always disappoints us. The rally in Washington, which took place against the symbolic and literal backdrop of the U.S. Capitol dome, seemed squarely in that tradition.

You'll notice that in the preceding paragraphs I use the word "privilege" in a very positive way. The sense of American privilege fills us with gratitude and humility. That privilege unites us across division and disagreement. It calls forth great energies.

There are, of course, some parts of society where the word "privilege" has a very negative



DAVID BROOKS
Comment

connotation. In those parts of society, history is not seen as a shared debate over how to pursue a common ideal. Instead it is seen as a zero-sum power struggle between oppressor and oppressed, and America is not a distinct and special place but just another country where the powerful stomp the vulnerable.

This prism is an understandable pedagogical tool. It's a way to show students the reality of injustice and inequality. But as several writers, including Phoebe Maltz Bovy, have argued, this concept of negative privilege doesn't seem to lead to productive social change.

The negative-privilege mindset usually begins with a privilege call-out. Somebody accuses someone of not checking their privilege. This leads the accused to respond that in fact my group has also been marginalized, and that if anyone is the oppressor, it's some other group more privileged than mine. This leads to an ever-higher-decibel-level identity war that sucks up everybody's good will and doesn't actually lead to social action.

It's the perfect exercise for the social media age because everything happens on the level of display. The result is a bunch of divisive bickering that leaves everyone feeling offended and morally superior. Saturday's march reminded me that it's still possible to practice a style of politics that doesn't send us down that recrimination psychodrama.

As Samuel Huntington used to argue, the key fact of the American Creed is distrust of centralized authority. So moments of creedal passion are almost always about opening up the system, expanding participation, decentralizing power. They are about new groups previously outside the system busting their way in and taking possession of the great privilege to be American.

Saturday's march reminded me that often we behave better than we talk. Sometimes I think the decimation of American history in the schools has left a generation ignorant of the creed and ungrateful toward our ancestors' heroic sacrifices that brought it down to us. When I look at the Twitter commentary of the march I see out of context insults that distort the reality of what actually happened.

But the deep inheritance isn't so easily blotted out. Saturday I saw people motivated by idealism and humbled by gratitude. Do some people have benefits they haven't earned? Yes, and some a lot more than others. But none of us has earned the great privilege we share together and which is the furnace of most reform.

David Brooks became a *New York Times* Op-Ed columnist in September 2003. He has been a senior editor at *The Weekly Standard*, a contributing editor at *Newsweek* and the *Atlantic Monthly*, and is currently a commentator on PBS.



YOUR VIEWS

Mixed messages from Pendleton City Hall

Evidently Pendleton City Hall is not pleased with the way Pacific Power is maintaining the streetlight system. Rather than require PP&L to use their considerable expertise in energy conservation to address the problem of high power consumption, it has been suggested that the Public Works Department purchase the streetlight system. Since the department is presently borrowing millions to upgrade water and sewer lines, it seems apparent they are ill-equipped to maintain this system. An Adopt a Streetlight Program, much like that established by the Parks Department, seems to be the only solution. Volunteers would be entrusted with monitoring their neighborhood lights, replacing those that burn out with new LED bulbs, relieving Public Works and PP&L of any responsibility. The savings could be used to buy more streetlights, or essential items like a plaque honoring those responsible for moving the Eighth Street Bridge to Main Street.

To pollute or not pollute, that is the question. The introduction of animal feces into the Umatilla River by dogs, goats, and some overenthusiastic Round-Up volunteers has finally led to some action by city hall. They have decided to appease the riparians by donating the parcel of land at

the bottom of Northeast Seventh Street as a wildlife refuge. Though originally envisioned as a playground for neighborhood children, the idea gained little support and was revised to place environmental concerns as the primary emphasis. Killing two birds with one stone, they've retained their playground and enlisted a nonprofit to maintain it in perpetuity, as the city manager put it. Those city hall folks seem easily fooled. If they were truly interested in keeping it in its natural pristine condition, it was suggested they post no trespassing signs. Maybe that's coming next.

Both the Pendleton School District and city hall are always asking for more funding. New sources of revenue are needed. Disposing of city property that's sitting idle, some for several years, and providing no property tax revenue has been suggested as a possible source. Unfortunately, attempts to date have been feeble at best. The Seventh Street property, the old DMV building, and the old police station are some examples. The two buildings continue to sit empty and deteriorating. Soon, the old fire station will join, contaminated with cancer-causing carcinogens. Can the city unload that one with a clear conscience? Perhaps razing both buildings would make the property more attractive for development.

Rick Rohde, Pendleton

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