

O EAST OREGONIAN PINION

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Founded October 16, 1875

OUR VIEW

20 years after an Oregon tragedy

Before Columbine, there was Thurston.

It seems like only yesterday that 15-year-old Kip Kinkel shocked the conscience of Oregon — indeed, the world — by gunning down classmates at Thurston High School in Springfield after ambushing his parents at home.

But it’s been 20 years. Kinkel is 35 and imprisoned. Last week the Oregon Supreme Court upheld his prison sentence of nearly 112 years with no possibility of parole. Experts at his sentencing had testified that his extreme psychosis was treatable but incurable.

It was May 21, 1998, when Kipland Philip Kinkel fatally shot two students, wounded 25 others and later tried to stab a police officer. The previous day at Thurston High, he had bought a stolen pistol from a friend, been arrested and — supposedly worried about what his parents would think about his arrest — shot and killed them.

Twenty years. Columbine and Virginia Tech. Sandy Hook and Fort Hood. Clackamas Town Center and Umpqua Community College.

Marjorie Stoneman Douglas High School in Florida and the Route 91 Harvest country music festival in Las Vegas.

As a state and as a nation, we have suffered much and learned some.

“Active shooter” is now ingrained in our vocabulary. Schools, law enforcement and medical units conduct drills. Protocols have been rewritten so first responders – thank God for their courage and training — confront the shooter as quickly as possible instead of awaiting SWAT’s arrival.

Threats and indicators of potential violence are taken seriously ... much of the time. SafeOregon.com has been created specifically for schoolchildren to report threats, replacing the Oregon State Police tip line launched after Thurston and then dropped for lack of funding.

Laws — including Oregon’s new extreme-risk protection order — have been passed allowing courts and law enforcement to intervene if someone is deemed psychologically at risk of harming self or others.

Yet in many ways, we seemingly



AP Photo/Don Ryan, file
In this May 1998 file photo, Thurston High School student Kip Kinkel, 15, is led to his arraignment in Eugene. Kinkel has lost an appeal to the Oregon Supreme Court, Thursday, where he had sought reduction of the 111-year sentence he received for the 1998 mass shooting at his high school.

have made little progress.

Access to mental health care is the No. 1 concern of Oregon high school students in a recent survey. Deadly violence, whether by firearms or other means, still plagues American society at levels far above those of most industrialized countries. We still don’t know what drives one irrational person to kill, but many more not to.

We have squandered an incalculable number of dollars, days and brain cells arguing over whom to blame —

mental illness, firearms, our culture — instead of finding common ground and community solutions. The resulting “opportunity cost” — what we could have achieved if we had pursued a different course — is profound.

Kip Kinkel came from a good home. His parents did their best, seeking both accountability and treatment for Kip.

We owe it to them, to the Thurston students — and to all the other families — to find that common ground and those collaborative solutions.

OTHER VIEWS

Delusions of Kanye West

Like many conservatives, I’ve taken some pleasure in the hysterical reaction to Kanye West’s recent right-wing flirtations: the panic of left-wing cultural consumers who have never had to separate an artist’s politics from his art, the aching thinkpieces from white liberals, the anathema from Pope Ta-Nehisi Coates.

But ultimately the joke in the Kanye experiment isn’t on liberals overreacting to his MAGA hat; it’s on conservatives excited by it. The episode highlights the stifling sweatbox quality of contemporary liberal discourse, but it doesn’t change the depth of right-wing cluelessness on race.

I don’t pretend to know how sincerely the artist sometimes known as Yeezy is flirting with reaction — though I suspect Kanyeism will end up resembling the “fascism” adopted by David Bowie in his Thin White Duke days. But I do know that his flirtations, in which he’s hung out with the right’s own race hustlers, are not a breakthrough moment for conservatives in their eternal quest to make the black Republican more than just an eccentric and embattled species. Instead, a celebrity who may be doing performance art is exactly the African-American “supporter” the Trump-era right deserves.

This is not because there is no common ground between conservatism and the black community. Indeed, a striking irony of this era is that the potential common ground has arguably increased.

The sociological transformation of the Republican Party into a working-class party means that its base has more in common economically with the average black American than the country-club GOP of yore. The secularization of American society means that the religious right and the churchgoing African-American community share a metaphysical worldview that’s faded elsewhere in our spiritual-but-less-religious nation. And the economic populism and foreign-policy anti-interventionism of Trumpism — well, at least campaign-season Trumpism — were closer to common African-American views than the typical Republican agenda.

So black America and conservatism have converged in interesting ways — but in the most important way they are inevitably divided, for the obvious reason that Donald Trump’s ascent began with a racist conspiracy theory and then added other white-identitarian appeals.

It is a liberal mistake to think that bigotry suffices to explain the Trump phenomenon. But it is a conservative error, naive or culpably ignorant, to act disappointed that black Americans aren’t attracted to a coalition led by a barely-repentant “birther” who flirts with white supremacists.



ROSS DOUTHAT
Comment

For decades, the essential failure of conservative outreach to African-Americans has been the insistence that the right just want to treat black Americans as individuals — a fine-sounding idea, except that white America has never found a way to treat its former slaves that way, making black identity politics not an indulgence but a matter of survival.

To this failure Trump has added an exclamation point. He has been shrewder than libertarian conservatives in recognizing that individualism is not enough, that the right needs a politics of solidarity. But his appeals to solidarity have often been racially exclusive in exactly the ways an African-American skeptic of conservatism would have predicted.

Is there an alternative? Realistically, maybe not: In the shadow of Trump, the pan-ethnic conservatism the country (and, for its long-term survival, the GOP) needs may be a fantasy. But conservatives who want their politics to be pan-ethnic might ponder two initial changes in how they approach racism and race.

First, conservatives who resist the idea that today’s racism can be legislated away need to think harder about how to honor the particularities of the African-American experience.

You don’t want to take down every Confederate statue or dethrone slave-owning founders? OK: What monuments to the slave or Jim Crow experience will you enthusiastically support? What more capacious retellings of history, with black heroes instead of sentimentalized Confederates, are you willing to endorse?

You don’t want the federal government interfering with local law enforcement? OK: Then when black people are obviously victims of local institutions, are you willing to elevate and defend them, to make them a cause célèbre, to act as if their concerns are yours as well?

Second, conservatives who want black Americans to give their policies a new hearing should repudiate policies that on the margins tend to disenfranchise black voters.

If you want people to consider joining your coalition, act like you want to compete for their vote, not just discourage them from voting.

These two suggestions are a beginning, not an end, and the right is obviously better off listening to actual black people than extremely white columnists like me.

But a red-pill rapper is a bad place to start that listening tour — at least if conservatives want a real bridge, not just a Kanye dream palace, linking worlds that are strangely close in certain ways but also as far apart as ever.

■
Ross Douthat joined The New York Times as an Op-Ed columnist in 2009.



YOUR VIEWS

Newspaper attempting thought control

The *East Oregonian* editors thought control police are in force once again determining what our local school boards should teach and what children (ten-year-olds) should read. At issue is the book “George,” written by an author whose website states “I am a genderqueer.”

The Hermiston School Board rightly determined this book is not age-appropriate for children. They did their research and determined “George” will cause confusion and raise questions about sexuality that middle grade students are not mature enough to understand.

The whole focus of “George” is sexuality and sexual identity from an adult transgender perspective. George is a ten-year-old boy genetically and physically but “she” (confused yet?) learns how to secretly erase browsing history on her mother’s computer so she can begin searching hormone therapy and transgender surgery. Her search is accomplished in secret so her parents will not be involved or add clarity and parental guidance for her sexual confusion.

Sadly, the crux of the book is George’s confusion and shame because she is a boy. “She immersed her body in warm water and tried not to think about what was between her legs, but there it was bobbing in front of her” (page 44). Later on in the book, George is encouraged to remove (his) sexual organs. “So like do you want to” — he made a gesture with two fingers like a pair of scissors — “go all the way?” George squeezed her legs together “Maybe someday.” (page 141)

The *EO* editors would have you believe they are the guardians of free speech and the *EO*, not school boards, has the moral authority to determine what reading material is age-appropriate in our schools. This writer has discovered the *EO* routinely censors and edits letters, erasing the quotes from the Bible and our Founding Fathers, because only the *EO* alone can determine what is appropriate for us to read and think. The definition of freedom of the press for the *EO* is: This is our newspaper and we will determine what people must think and we will edit and/or censor anybody who does not agree with us.

Stuart Dick
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