Facts Matter
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Opinion

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"Our aim:
To fear God,
tell the truth
and make money."
H.C. Paddock
1852-1935

Keep the faith, teachers

Despite hassles of teaching in a pandemic, we need good ones more than ever

Our View

Ask a group of good teachers what moves them, what keeps them interested, what keeps them evolving.

It won't take long before "joy" enters that list.

Teachers thrive on the joy they get from getting through to a child, from seeing them dream and then achieve those dreams. From seeing children become productive happy adults.

Joy in the teaching arena has been in short supply for the past couple of years with the rampant the COVID-19 pandemic has wrought.

Uncertainty over whether to teach in-class or remotely, changing course on a dime, hybrid scheduling, quarantine protocols, social distancing, classroom disinfection, attention-keeping, burnout, angry parents. The drawbacks are endless.

For some teachers it's become all too much. And that's understandable. Some have opted to retire, some to move to less volatile jobs.

Liberty Elementary School third-grade teacher Olga Fishkin works with her students in Bartlett.

Couple that with a yearslong trend of fewer college students entering the field and you have a shortage of teachers — when we need those who inspire our children the most.

It's worsened by a lack of qualified substitute teachers. Many suburban school districts have resorted to raising daily rates considerably, and they still have trouble filling holes.

Results of a fall 2021 survey conducted for the Illinois Association of Regional Superintendents of Schools included responses from 663 of Illinois' 852 public school districts.

Some 88% of respondents said they didn't have enough full-time teachers; 96% reported being short of substitutes.

While many parents worry about the value of an education provided on a Chromebook from a child's bedroom, the larger matter of concern is whether there are teachers to instruct them at all.

We are better off in our corner of the state, but still 79% of schools in the northeastern region of Illinois report being understaffed.

And most of them said the shortage is worsening.

Kathi Griffin is president of the Illinois Education Association, the state's largest teachers union. She said the pandemic has accelerated the teacher shortage.

"I don't think that the general public realizes the stress, as well as what is being expected of educators," she said. "It's like, OK, we went back in the fall, and the doors opened, and magically everything was supposed to go back to how it was from March of 2020. And that's just not realistic."

As suburbanites, one of our greatest assets has been a quality education. In order to preserve that, it behooves us all to avoid heaping our frustrations on teachers.

For those teachers who witness the spark now and then, the joy remains. It just could be harder to find.

Don't lose faith in the incredibly important work you do.

Your Views

Wrong side of democracy

In her Jan. 14 column, Debra Saunders disparages Biden for equating Republicans defending new state laws restricting voting to George Wallace and Bull Connor.

Let's apply the Duck Test: if it looks like a duck, swims like a duck, and quacks like a duck, then it probably is a duck. Republicans passed these laws immediately after Biden won due to record Black voter turnout.

Wallace and Connor fought Black voting unabashedly. Republicans today fight Black voting surreptitiously, hidden among provisions of laws that purport to make voting faster.

Author Texas who still has his *receipt from the state's last poll tax, it was obvious to all at the time that the reason for collecting it was not for the* official rationale of providing the state with revenue, but to stop poor Blacks from voting. And it should be obvious to all today that the real reason for the new laws is the same — to stop poor Blacks from voting.

So yes, the antics of Republicans defending the new laws are no different from those of Bull Connor and Wallace, and both groups are on the wrong side of democracy, morality, and history.

Daroid Barnum
Oak Park

Lies should not be printed

Byron York in his Jan. 16 opinion piece about Republicans pushing back on the so-called Democratic big lie starts out with a lie by claiming Ms. Abrams never conceded the 2018 Georgia Governors race; he needs to do better research.

He continues the lies throughout his article. Normally, the Daily Herald could easily have researched and refuted, but yet they did not by evidence of publication. Reach, DH, how can you print such [illegible] and distribute? It certainly calls into [illegible] the business of distributing different [illegible] and political thought.

[illegible] deals in the press are usually [illegible] by showing opposing thought on truth, which Mr. York clearly lacks. As usual with the Republican Party, what they cannot reach from lack of ideas they try to do with [illegible] night laws or through attempts at insurrection. Shame on you DH for printing such garbage.

Rich Garling
Grayslake

Appalling rudeness

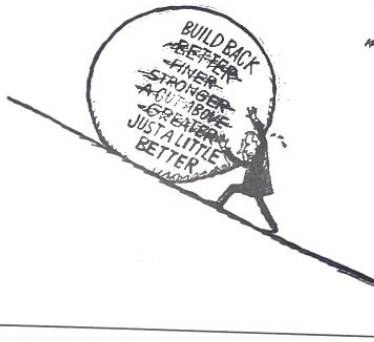
I was out to a local restaurant that required proof of vaccination, and I was absolutely appalled at how some of the patrons treated the staff when asked for proof. These poor employees didn't make the rules. Instead of being rude and selfish, maybe people should realize we are all going through this.

Brad Hofbauer
Wheeling

Join the conversation

We welcome your comments (300-word limit). Letters must include your full name, town and phone number. Letters are subject to editing, and may be posted online. We do not guarantee publication of every letter.

Email: fencepost@dailyherald.com



To honor King, oppose injustice

Javeed Akhter
Guest Voice

"Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter" said Dr. Martin Luther King, whose birthday we celebrated this week. He and other wise women and men have pointed out the folly of ignoring injustice. But we as humanity continue to do so.

A common fault of human nature is to turn our eyes look the other way. I am as guilty of this as any. I can't count the number of times I have walked past a homeless person on Michigan Avenue or State Street or have lamented on the economic, social and healthcare inequity in the society I live in, the greater Chicago area but have done nothing about it.

I am aware but have looked away. I rationalize: it is not my fault, or there isn't much I can do as an individual. This fault of ignoring injustice gets magnified on a world stage.

The small but brutal country of Myanmar has ethnically wiped out the poor and weak Rohingya community with little or no price to pay. Both the military dictatorship and civil society including Aung San Suu Kyi played a role. Suu Kyi should not be in jail for opposing the military regime but should be held accountable for not only turning her eyes away from brazen atrocities in her country, but claiming they never happened. As dramatic a case of moral blindness as ever.

The Chinese government's treatment of Uighurs is different but more diabolical and sinister. Not only have they used the age-old tactics of mass incarceration, labeled re-education camps, but have systematically destroyed the Uighurs' Turkish Muslim culture and through forced sterilization are aggressively reducing their numbers. The world community is now fully aware of it. Western governments including the United States have spoken out against it but have not taken any action.

This is better than most Muslim majority countries that have remained silent. The reason appears to be China's economic clout. China is the world's factory and, increasingly, its largest money lender. Through its large investments in the Belt and Roads program, it has given so much money to many countries that it has virtually stuffed their mouths and covered their eyes with Yuans.

Private multinationals continue to deal with China as they have no immediate alternative. Apple continues to make its products in China and Tesla is making its cars in Shanghai and opened a dealership in Xinjiang, the epicenter of atrocities against the Uighur Muslim minority. They can take a moral stand and move out of China, but they look at business as an amoral enterprise answerable to profits. If businesses are not directly involved with oppression, they feel they can turn their eyes away.

Personally, the most painful example of a country inexorably slipping toward the potential genocide of a Muslim minority is the country of my birth, India. A country that chose to be democratic and pluralistic, has a history of inclusiveness of the "other" and boasts leaders like Gandhi, Nehru, Abul Kalam Azad and Ambedkar, is now in the death throes of a struggle for its very soul.

Using its majority in the national assembly, the right-wing Hindu party, the BJP, has rammed through legislation that severely limits freedom of religion. Christian churches have been attacked under the false accusation that they are converting naïve Hindus through bribery and other nefarious means. Muslims are accused of seducing innocent Hindu women to marry and convert to Islam.

The connivance of local law and administration has emboldened right-wing Hindu goons to go on a spree of mob lynching Muslims. The abhorrent exercise of public lynching that mercifully is part of the past in the U.S., is current and becoming more prevalent in India. Open incitement for killing of Muslims by some Hindu religious figures has met with a nod and a wink.

In fact, the ruling party in its election campaign in Uttar Pradesh and other states is using anti-Muslim hate speech as a way of getting votes. Appease the Hindus by abusing the Muslim has proven an effective election tactic in the past. The opposition parties are afraid to speak up as they would be blamed of Muslim appeasement and lose their chance of regaining power.

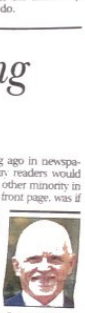
The entire country, not just politicians, but the judiciary and the middle class, in and outside India, pretends as if nothing is happening. Hundreds of millions of eyes have turned away from the specter of Muslim genocide when all the signs are there.

A minority of Indian activists like Arundhati Roy, Ram Punyani and Margaret Alva have spoken up. Harsh Mander, another activist, has written a book on this human fault titled "Looking Away: Inequality, Prejudice and Indifference."

It would be a nice tribute to Martin Luther King if we took a pledge not to look away from injustice.

• Javeed Akhter is a physician and freelance writer from Oak Brook.

Portraying diversity



Jim Slusher
Letter to readers

There was a time not so long ago in newspapering when about the only way readers would see the face of a Black person or other minority in the paper, and especially on the front page, was if the person committed a crime.

Thankfully, times change. But they don't always change fast or far enough.

In a discussion Tuesday between Daily Herald editors and members of the paper's Diversity Advisory Panel, the issue took on a perplexing dimension. One of the chief observations among members of the diversity panel since we founded it last year has been an understandable concern, that people with minority ethnic or cultural backgrounds don't see people like themselves often enough in positive stories and pictures or even in reports about what we might call "everyday" suburban events and activities — feature photos of people enjoying a winter snowfall, for instance, or attending local government meetings or community festivals.

And, it was one of the citizen panel members who put the issue in sharp focus. The woman, who is white, is very active in the civic and social life of her community, but lamented that she rarely sees Black people or other minorities at board meetings she attends or large, popular community festivals. "If they're not going to these things," she asked, "where are they going?" That's an important question, and purely from a news-management perspective, it's a useful signal that we at the newspaper need to be making more of an effort to get to the events and attractions that those populations are attending.

But limiting ourselves to that strategy poses a clear risk. It suggests it might be progress if we simply attend certain cultural or political events that attract minority populations, an observation only slightly more accurate than in the past. True, it's an advance of sorts if minorities can be shown in situations other than crime reports; but, it's not enough of an advance if the trade-off is that they find themselves only in reports on religious festivals or culturally focused social events.

The ultimate answer, it seems to me, goes beyond the newspaper's responsibility to portray people from minority communities in everyday suburban life. It also involves finding ways to encourage more minority involvement in everyday suburban life. Any occasional news consumer can easily see that in once almost restrictively white local leadership positions, Blacks, Muslims, Asians, Hispanics and members of other races are making consequential strides and contributions. But our panel member's question still looms large on the matter of everyday life. Why do people from these populations still seem to be in the background, if they appear at all, at so many community events?

Dealing with that question is not simple, and it involves more than just newspapers making extra efforts to get people of color into their pages. Governments and event organizers may also need to be thinking more about the minority memberships of their communities as they plan and advertise events. Perhaps, minorities should do more to explore local activities, and other participants may be able to do more to make them feel welcome.

Those are actions outside the newspaper's control, of course, but they certainly may be advanced if we at least do a better job of showing minorities participating in local life. Our editors, photographers and writers are committed to doing that. We hope that's a step toward both more faithful representation of the racial makeup of our communities and more routine interaction among all of us in the affairs of suburban life.

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