

M 1 | THURSDAY | JANUARY 3, 2008 | ST. LOUIS POST-DISPATCH | STLOUIDAY.COM | B7

OTHER VIEWS

MORE LETTERS ONLINE "I can add another Alan Greenspan 'lumble' to those mentioned in the editorial 'The Fed Fumbles,'" writes Darin Gilley of Pacific. "Mr. Greenspan's unabashed support of free-trade agreements also played a key role in the subprime crisis and the crisis in living standards facing many Americans." Read and talk about this letter and more letters online at STLOUIDAY.com/letters.

Monday • Josh Goldberg, Paul Krugman Tuesday • Ed Folsch, Matthew Good Wednesday • Bob Herbert, David Ignatius Thursday • Kathleen Parker Saturday • Eli Guczman Sunday • Charles Krauthammer, Leonard Pitts

POINT OF VIEW

What if the presidential candidates took on Highway 40?

This week's Highway 40 closure overlaps with the start of primary season — a coincidence not lost on the presidential candidates who gathered recently to discuss our transportation travails. Debate transcripts are scarce, but I snagged a bootleg copy. Enjoy:
Tim Russert: Senator Clinton, let's begin with you. What's your opinion of the Highway 40 closure?
Clinton: Well, Tim, I'm glad to be here in St. Louis to talk about this important issue. It's unfortunate that you and this boy's club must be targeting me, the only woman, with your pile-on question, but I can take it. Gender has no bearing on this election.
Russert: Senator, I don't consider that a sexist question ...
Clinton: Of course you don't. You're part of the vast chauvinist conspiracy bent on destroying a candidacy upon which the fate of women everywhere depends. Not that my gender matters. Any-

way, I initially supported the closure, but I now oppose it. It's a quagmire. I blame George Bush.
Russert: Senator Obama, Senator Clinton says you lack the experience to solve problems like this one. You care to respond?
Obama: Yes, Tim, but not with the same petty, vindictive, show-biz personal attacks that characterize my opponent. I think St. Louisans are ready to rise above the acrimony and initiate my hopeful nobility by embracing the hopeful future of public transportation and, hopefully, electric cars.
Russert: So you believe in the highway project?
Obama: It's time to transcend this pre-Obama, getcha construction companies to get rich while working stills get stuck in traffic. When I'm president, I'll make sure corporate greed never closes another highway!
Russert: You don't believe Highway 40 needs improvement?
Edwards: Not for a minute. Tim, I know all about these deceitful fat cats. I've freed them in court. I've lived in their millionaire neighborhoods. I've patronized their overpriced hair salons. And I'll tell you something: Their lavish lifestyles make me sick.
Russert: Congressman Kucinich, do you have a solution?
Kucinich: I do. My transportation plan builds on the innovations of interplanetary vehicles.
Russert: Congressman Kucinich, do you really believe these folks have, but I did lose 10 pounds — the equivalent of

Barack Obama — by jogging. Maybe St. Louisans should jog to work.
Russert: Senator McCain, any comment on this project?
McCain: Yeah, I got a comment for you. I'll follow the planners of this disaster to the gates of hell.
Russert: Congressman Paul, do you support this project?
Paul: Are you kidding? Our founding fathers never built highways! They never even drove! This is an unconstitutional, big-government scam!
Russert: I'll give you the last word, Senator Thompson.
Thompson: Zzzzz ...
Russert: We'll come back to Senator Thompson. Governor Romney, you supported the closure and now oppose it. Why the flip-flop?
Romney: I realized I was wrong, Tim. Alas, it's wildly unpopular with Republican primary voters.
Russert: And you, Governor Huckabee?
Huckabee: Tim, I don't have the money or fancy pedigree these folks have, but I did lose 10 pounds — the equivalent of

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COLLEEN CAMPBELL



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OUR LOCAL CONTRIBUTORS

Celebrate excellence and challenge exclusion



A family's history of love, honor and persistence.

By Terence Freeman
I did not grow up here in the city of my birth, so I often have missed sharing the local ritual of disclosing the name of my high school to inquisitive St. Louisans. Even so, my extended family has deep roots in this area, and it is largely responsible for the work I do in promoting inclusion and celebrating the distinct voices that represent our community. I grew up hearing them.
I know that my family — with its history of persistence against the odds and against exclusion without merit — is responsible for my unearned privilege of growing up surrounded by books, two-parent families, standard English and a commitment to excellence.
I celebrate my mother, LaVerne, who grew up in Alton. She didn't have a college degree, but I watched her read at least one book every week of her adult life until dementia took its toll on her. I excelled in school because she excelled in introducing her children to books, museums, science, history and geography.
I celebrate my father, Calvin, who fought in three campaigns as part of the select 20th Regimental Combat Team, the first wave of the Buffalo Soldiers 92nd Infantry Division to land in Naples, Italy, in August 1944 during World War II. He later worked for and eventually retired from the U.S. Postal Service, and I don't recall him ever calling in sick. Nor was he ever without hobbies or the joy of learning something new, whether it was ham radio or woodworking.
I celebrate my grandfather Ivory Pendleton. He built homes in Alton in which he was forbidden to live, and his ability to work was limited by a union he could not join. I remember him reciting the names of all the states and their capitals in less than two minutes.
My great-grandfather John McLaughlin was the son of a Texas Ranger. As a teen in Mississippi, he could have lived a life of white privilege if he had left the home of his mother, who had given birth to a black child in 1877. Even though his younger siblings left, he chose to stay,

With my great-grandmother Clemmie, he eventually raised six black children. One of them had been adopted — rescued, really, from the death that too frequently was the fate of black children born to white mothers in the South.
I celebrate my white great-great-grandmother, Jennie Goodfellow, who is buried in "colored row" in a St. Charles cemetery. A member of the family for which Goodfellow Boulevard is named, she was shunned by that family after giving birth to a black child in 1879. And I celebrate Dorothy Freeman Pugh who overcame poison and prejudice to graduate from Lincoln Park School. In November of 1942, she became the first African-American woman to pass the bar in Missouri. My family's history is one of people choosing love and honor over convenience and comfort.
A failure to recognize the contributions of our families and communities to the collective heritage and success of our area would take dishonor and ungrateful arrogance. I celebrate black history because the stories of triumph can be an inspiration to all. I celebrate diversity because it feels like family, because there are so many voices worth hearing and because of the opportunities lost when excellence is excluded.
College degrees are not a prerequisite for excellence of character and achievement. Excellence is not confined to only certain skin colors, genders, ages, economic classes, sexual orientations or styles of diction. Recognizing and battling restrictive barriers to achievement is not playing the so-called victim card, but refusing to pursue excellence because of those obstacles only allows those who would exclude others to win an easy battle.
My family's stories are not unique, but they are a reminder that sometimes the history we should celebrate is closer to home than we might think.

Terence Freeman of Spanish Lake is an engineering professor at St. Louis Community College. A national program director for 100 Black Men of America, Freeman has served as a consultant and advisor for churches, community organizations, schools, industry and law enforcement agencies.

Sortng out candidates' experience argument

Holiday Inn Express' commercials show Average Joe about to start a job requiring training and skill. Then he confesses that he's not really qualified. "But I did stay at a Holiday Inn Express last night," he says.
Translation: He may not know much, but he's got smart.
Barack Obama must have been taking notes. He may not have much foreign policy experience, but, hey, he's traveled to visit his grandmother who lives in a tiny hut in Africa.
So Americans are thinking: Yes, this makes perfect sense, especially if you squint your eyes really, really hard and hum "The Star-Spangled Banner."

The hat came up as Obama was addressing the "experience" question that has dogged his presidential campaign, contrasting his get-down bona fides with those of a certain former first lady whose claim to experience in foreign matters also corresponds primarily to travel.
Hillary Clinton may have met dignitaries in her ceremonial role as first lady, Obama implies, but does she have a handle on real people? "It's that experience, that understanding, not just of what world leaders I went and talked to in the ambassador's house I had tea with, but understanding the lives of the people like my grandmother who lives in a tiny hut in Africa," said Obama.

Poor grandma. Here she gave Obama good enough genes to get Boston's Boston Red Sox to Harvard and a seat in the U.S. Senate, and still she's getting a "widespread over a drug fire in the proverbial fry hut." Uh, these kids today.
Later, when Benazir Bhutto was assassinated, Obama adviser David Axelrod suggested that Clinton's vote on the Iraq War was connected to Bhutto's murder. Translation: Experience isn't all it's cracked up to be.
Axelrod's explanation was that if not for the war — which Clinton supported, in case you missed that — the United States would have been more focused on Afghanistan and al-Qaida and, therefore, the stability of Pakistan, then we have to look at it in a wider context. What we do do Iraq matters."

Terrible as it was, Bhutto's death, coming just a few days before Iowa caucuses, reminded campaign-laddo Americans that this presidential election isn't about hair-pooing, cross-dressing or floating crosses — entertaining as those dimensions have been. Until further notice, it's primarily about terrorism, and what happens "over there" imposes harsh realities over here.
For her part, Clinton didn't miss the opportunity to note that she knew Benazir personally. Otherwise, the Clinton campaign and assorted friends have fired back that Clinton has done more than partake of tea, inevitably breathing new life in the teapot tempest of it. Former Secretary of State Madeleine Albright issued a statement on Clinton's behalf:
"Sen. Clinton has been in refugee camps, clinics, orphanages and villages all around the world, including places where she is not the usual drink. In addition to these experiences, she has met with world leaders and has known many of them for years."
When it comes to exposure to foreign leaders, clearly Clinton has more experience than Obama. But just as clearly, there's a continental divide between meeting heads of state as a president's wife and meeting with them as leader of the free world.
The truth is that neither Clinton nor Obama has much foreign policy experience. But does having such experience necessarily qualify someone for the presidency?
The answer may be found in Bill Richardson's immigrant remarks upon hearing of Bhutto's murder:
"Whereupon a spokesman for Sen. Joe Biden, chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee, said that Ms. Richardson's stepping down is "the last thing we need until we know what really happened and who's responsible."
Now there's a concept. Wait, wait, listen, learn, speak.
What happened in Pakistan still may be unclear, but this much we know: Every utterance from a president's lips matters. Clinton always was wrong to claim her husband's experience as her own, while Obama sounds merely silly pretending that having family in another country qualifies him in foreign affairs. One presumes an electorate without mercy to the other parents to an audience of none.
Neither inspires much confidence.

Then first lady Hillary Clinton with Pakistani Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto in 1995. Saied Khan / APPI/Getty Images



KATHLEEN PARKER



Barack Obama's grandmother, Sarah Grayson Obama.

Boston Herald / APPI/Getty Images



Terence Freeman



Then first lady Hillary Clinton with Pakistani Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto in 1995.