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OTHER VIEWS

MORE LETTERS ONLINE "Mother Teresa is a prime example of a person working out her destiny while her feelings were put at the bottom of her list of priorities," writes Carol Conner of DeSoto, Mo. "Mother Teresa did everything by faith, not by feelings. We all doubt at one time or another." Read and talk about this letter and more letters online at STLOUIDay.com/letters.

Monday • Josh Goldberg, Paul Krugman
Tuesday • David Brooks, Maureen Dowd
Wednesday • Bob Herbert, David Ignatius
Thursday • Kathleen Parker
Saturday • Helen Goodstun
Sunday • Charles Krauthammer, Leonard Pitts

POINT OF VIEW

Outrage overload follows a summer of scandals

The other night, while eating in a room lined with televisions, I looked up mid-bite and saw a picture of Idaho Sen. Larry Craig. I could not hear the anchorwoman's comments, but her solemn grimace told me all I needed to know: Craig had done something outrageous, and he would be our villain of the week.

And so he was. Accused of propositioning a police officer in an airport restroom in June, Craig had pleaded guilty and hoped to dodge publicity. But the incident caught up with him last week, as news networks began probing footage of his clumsy explanations and taking bites out of his imploding career.

COLLEEN CARROLL CAMPBELL



proving for underage sex on "To Catch a Predator." If we prefer to focus on higher profile rape or abduction cases, we can tune in to CNN's Nancy Grace, who works herself into a righteous fury seven nights a week. As she cross-examines suspects, her defense attorneys and rants against the microcosms whose

crimes keep her in business. Grace makes no pretense of dispassionate reporting. She is a proxy for the angry viewer, and her rags-fish catcalls. It is odd that a popular culture allergic to moral absolutism has spawned such moralistic entertainment. Perhaps our unraveling moral compass has made us eager to find evils upon which we can agree and identify a few bright lines we cannot cross. We may yell at the kids or kick the dog, but at least we don't molest children or electrocute puppies.

This form of self-affirmation comes at a cost. The recent sacrifice of a guest interrogated by Grace and one caught in a sex sting orchestrated by "To Catch a Predator" are troubling reminders that the targets of our feeding frenzies, despicable as their deeds may be, deserve judges less partial than entertainers.

OUR LOCAL CONTRIBUTORS



The collapsed Interstate 35W Bridge in Minneapolis Aug. 31.

Do we have the will to restore our infrastructure?

By Terrence L. Freeman

A deteriorating infrastructure continues to confront the United States, raising serious questions about our will and ability to address the problems we face.



MODOT workers inspect and repair the underside of the Washington, Mo., bridge over the Missouri River last month. J.B. Forber/Post-Dispatch

President Franklin D. Roosevelt's commitment to rural electrification during the Depression.

Republican President Dwight D. Eisenhower turned the vision of a national highway system into reality in the mid-1950s, despite having lost both houses of Congress to Democratic control.

President John F. Kennedy captured our imagination with his commitment to space exploration and a lunar landing.

Throughout our history we have made great economic strides in the midst of challenge when competent leaders of both major parties joined together with the private sector to build infrastructure. They led with vision, not slogans. They left a legacy of access to services and possibilities that expanded the middle class and generated wealth.

If we do not demand more from our leaders than slogans, procrastination, earmarks and inaction, they will not matter the bit to us.

As we grapple in traffic or argue about Medicaid in our air-conditioned homes, perhaps we can take a moment to recall that the infrastructure we take for granted came to be and consider the price we are willing to pay to provide even greater possibilities for generations to come.

FREEDOM

Tolerance, taste and getting the joke

Cartoon license has returned once again with the usual menu of outrage, effigy-burning, hurt feelings and apologies.

Artists and liberals duke it out both in the United States and in Europe; it is no longer seem implausible that the world will go up in a mushroom cloud because some fevered fanatic couldn't take a joke.

In Europe, it's the Swedes this time who have offended some Muslims with cartoons depicting the prophet Muhammad, including one that shows the prophet's head on the body of a dog.

Outrage was swift. Egypt complained, Jordan condemned, Afghanistan protested and Iran — that arbiter of taste and protocol — suggested ways Sweden could become a better country.

In Pakistan, where effigies are a cottage industry, "Muslim youth" burned a straw likeness of Swedish Prime Minister Fredrik Reinfeldt. Reinfeldt, in turn, briefly and heartily articulated why "Westerners allow cartoonists to be offensive."

"We are eager to ensure that Sweden remains a country in which Muslims and Christians ... can live side by side in a spirit of mutual respect," he said. "We are also eager to stand up for freedom of expression, which is enshrined in the constitution ... which ensures that we do not make political decisions about what gets published in newspapers."

As was the case with the Danish cartoons published in 2005 that sparked riots in 2006, the hatch may get offensive without being especially humorous or trenchant. A drawing does not a cartoon make.

But Western principles protecting the right of free speech cover medicine expression as well. And tolerance applies not just to the beliefs of others but also, sometimes, to our own hurt feelings.

These lessons of freedom and tolerance, which we can't seem to export with much success, apparently are lost on some American newspaper editors who declined recently to run two of Berkeley Breathed's weekly "Opus" comic strips out of concern — or was it fear — that they were potentially offensive to Muslims. Breathed's humor paper, The Washington Post, was among 25 that opted out. (Full disclosure: Both Breathed's strip and my columns are syndicated by The Washington Post Writers Group, and I confess to great affection for Opus, a penguin.)

Except for the timing of these two cartoonist eruptions, Breathed's comics and the European depictions wouldn't belong in the same paragraph. When it comes to quality of execution and depth of thought, there's little comparison. Breathed's strips were so good, in fact, that the wrong people were offended. He wasn't ridiculing Muslims; he was making fun of Americans, especially the media, hubristic variety who think they know what's best for everyone else. To paraphrase another cartoon character, we have met the joke, and it is us.

The first "Opus" strip in question, which can be viewed at Salon.com and comic.com, shows a character named Lola Grande dressed in a Muslim headscarf and veil. "A Muslim fundamentalist?" asks her boyfriend, Steve. "No," she says. "Rackal Islamist. Hot new fad in the planet." The final panel suggests that, given Lola's new identity, Steve will be denied her affections.

The second strip continues the plotline and shows Lola and Steve preparing for the beach. Steve urges Lola to wear that "mehdi" hot yellow polka-dot bikini and reminds her, "You love freedom. You love hotness. And you love that I'm so darned smart about what's best for you." Lola emerges from the dressing room covered head-to-toe in a "burqa." Fatigued cartoonists to risky business; they're not intended to be taken literally. And, reading letters posted at Salon.com, it's clear that everyone has his own interpretation of what the strips are saying. Breathed himself has stayed out of it.

What seems clear, however, is that strip is making fun of a certain shallowness on our side of the pond. Breathed often is hard on males, and no one looks more foolish in these strips than the Steve character, who is oblivious to all but his own needs and desires.

If anyone is offended, in other words, it should be American males.

What also is clear is that the editors who killed these strips surrendered in advance of controversy. Thanks to previous acts of protest and intimidation, rackal Muslims have succeeded in directing editorial content of America's free, and liberally courageous, press.

The joke really is on us. And it's not funny.

If you'd like to see more of the cartoonist's work, visit www.opus.com.
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