

OPINION

The Palm Beach Post

REAL NEWS STARTS HERE

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THE PALM BEACH POST EDITORIAL BOARD mission is to articulate the issues of the day, advocate for policies for the betterment of the community and encourage a civil and robust exchange of ideas. The Board consists of Executive Editor Rick Christie, Editorial Page Editor Tony Doris and Editorial Writer Douglas C. Lyons.

Americans, check your preconceptions of one another

Your Turn

Gerald Salerno
Guest columnist

After reading a recent column by Leonard Pitts Jr., “Real” conservatives are about 30 years too late,” I am drawn to memories of a film I have seen way too many times, 1985’s *The Breakfast Club*. There, five high school seniors who have committed various acts of delinquency are remanded for punishment to the school library for a full day of Saturday detention. In charge is teacher Richard Vernon, with an assignment for them to write an essay stating who they are. Mr. Vernon makes it clear he already knows who the kids are and what they are about – they are delinquents after all, and he expects them to live up to that. Mr. Vernon fears these library captives might be responsible for the end of the world as we know it, and maybe he is right.

Pitts also makes it clear that he knows what “conservatives” really believe and what they are all about based on some preconceived notions that he has developed, just as Mr. Vernon did with the students.

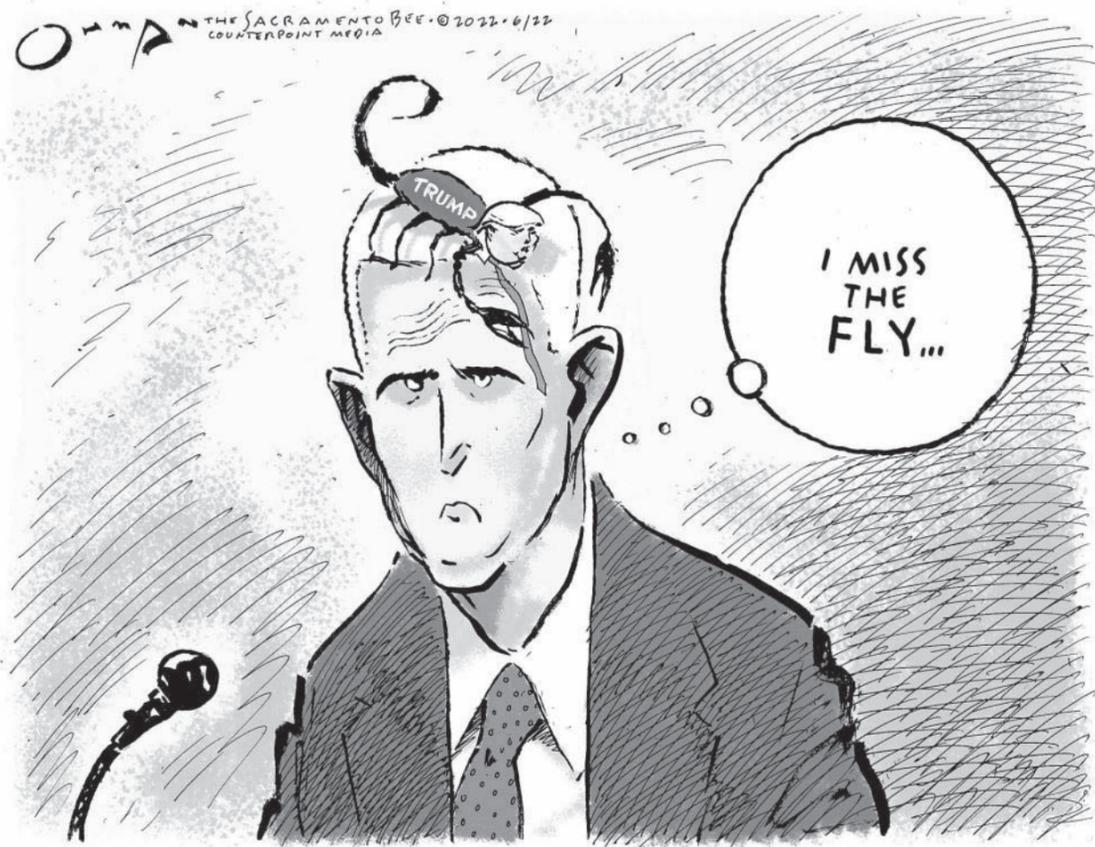
He uses words like xenophobia and racism and conspiracy and violence to describe those who do not think like he does. The error is not just in the type-casting but also the self-assuring validity and arrogance of his beliefs.

In the movie, the students fight back. They are comfortable in who they are and in what they believe, despite Mr. Vernon’s disapproval. The children do not need Mr. Vernon’s acceptance or even understanding. Things do not have to be done Mr. Vernon’s way. In the end the students do write an essay to Mr. Vernon. It reads: “We think you are crazy for making us write an essay telling you who we think we are. You see us as you want to see us, in the simplest terms, in the most convenient definitions.”

Pete Townsend, of the rock group The Who, wrote the song, *The Kids are Alright*. So too are conservatives and Trump supporters, alright. Mr. Vernon created stereotypes based on how the students dressed, how many team varsity letters they had and on academic performance. Pitts creates stereotypes based on how people vote in elections. Both are dead wrong. Outward appearances (or silent ones like you Trump supporters without Trump 24 bumper stickers) do not tell the entire story.

Republicans are your neighbors and more importantly, Americans. We are frustrated that, under Democratic leadership it used to cost \$35 to fill the tank with gas and now it’s more like \$60. We do not accept that it’s Putin’s fault. Trump is not responsible for this massive inflation. And we don’t deserve to be called names. The last scene of the film is Mr. Vernon alone in the library reading the essay. He doesn’t get the message. It’s a shame. Pitts doesn’t either.

Gerald Salerno is a West Palm Beach criminal defense lawyer and a member of The Palm Beach Post’s Editorial Advisory Board.



JACK OHMAN/COUNTERPOINT MEDIA

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Aronberg deserves praise for punditry

“Aronberg’s cable news punditry criticized” relied on reporting of several defense attorneys and former prosecutors, mostly anonymous, to criticize three-term Palm Beach County State Attorney Dave Aronberg because he appears two or three times a week for five-minute expert commentary on national television. He speaks on such topics as school shootings, constitutional abortion rights and other subjects of national legal interest, all on his own time, before or after his workday.

Rather than be criticized for claimed low morale in his office due to low salaries provided by the state budget, Aronberg should be praised for the national media’s recognition of his expertise in educating the public on the vital public interest legal subjects that he talks about. Could it be that the critics are envious or jealous of Aronberg’s legal talents?

If critics want higher morale and salaries for prosecutors, they should complain to the state legislators and governor who set the budgets for the Office State Attorney.

Ira Rabb is a retired New York Supreme Court Justice living in West Palm Beach.

Aronberg’s an exemplary state attorney

Dave Aronberg is an example of what a state attorney should strive to be. We no longer see queues of people wrapped around pill mills waiting for their oxycodone. The tsunami of sober homes that entered our municipalities has ebbed in the past few years. These are examples of the legislative work of State Attorney Aronberg, the excellent working relationship he has with our Palm Beach County Sheriff Ric Bradshaw’s office and his legal expertise and that of his staff.

Aronberg engages with the local community. It is no wonder that he caught the attention of news and talk shows. The State Attorney’s Office is similar in ways to a medical training hospital. The brightest and the best professionals are chosen to work there coming from varied backgrounds and experiences. There are many personal and professional reasons for staff to move on. There has been a steep increase in the cost of living in



State Attorney Dave Aronberg speaks to the media after Tiger Woods’ hearing at the North County Courthouse in Palm Beach Gardens on Oct. 27, 2017. ALLEN EYESTONE/PALM BEACH POST

Palm Beach County, with housing prices soaring. If there were exit interviews of those 23 assistant state attorneys, we would probably hear remuneration is the issue and not the working environment or the personality of our state attorney.

Dr. Lori Vinikoor, Delray Beach

Magera’s death best left unreported

I read with sadness the article about Bam Magera. Other than sensationalizing this young man’s persistent troubles with substance use disorder, what possible value was there in running this story? There are about 20 million Americans with some form of substance use disorder and only 10% of those get treatment. Individuals with SUDs deal with so much shame on their own that keeps them oftentimes from seeking treatment. It is an important part of the treatment process to begin to heal this shame.

The article is a form of “piling on” more shame. To subject this individual to public shaming does him no good. Moreover, the article mentions the Marchman Act, a law designed to help people into recovery. That information is confidential. The state of Florida decided not to make these matters public so that people could get help. Please consider these matters.

Joe Considine, West Palm Beach

New book revisits harsh realities of Dozier school



Your Turn

Bill Cotterell
Guest columnist

The scientific sleuth who forced Florida to look at the violent abuse and death of boys locked up at the infamous juvenile prison near Marianna has just published a chilling book about her project.

“We Carry Their Bones” is a brief but detailed account of Erin Kimmerle’s work in the red hills and pine forests of Jackson County a few years ago. Kimmerle, an associate professor at the University of South Florida and director of the Florida Institute of Forensic Anthropology and Applied Science, unearths a compelling tale that many Floridians would rather keep buried.

Thousands of young offenders — some in for real crimes, but many sent away for truancy or just being “incorrigible” — passed through the John G. Dozier school between 1900 and 2011, when it was finally shut down. The sprawling campus was a major employer in Jackson County and nobody cared much about boys from poor, powerless families — most of them African-American — who got in trouble in the Jim Crow era.

That attitude is illustrated early in the book when Kimmerle tells of asking a courthouse archivist for rec-

ords of boys kept at the school long ago. The archivist sharply corrected her, saying they were “inmates” rather than “children” and dismissed the lack of documentation because, “They was throwaways.”

“For the record,” Kimmerle writes, “I do not believe we throw away children.”

Before joining USF, she worked with the Smithsonian Institute on identification of Native American remains. She also worked with the United Nations, analyzing remains in war zones of the Balkans.

Black men who survived stints at Dozier when they were juveniles banded together as “The White House Boys” and spoke out about sadistic beatings, torture, sexual abuse, disappearances and deaths at what was euphemistically called the “reform school” in the past century. Kimmerle worked with them and gathered data from the state, and excavated a burial ground called “boot hill” in a wooded area with crude crosses for 31 burial sites.

Using ground-penetrating radar, Kimmerle and her crew started in 2012 and eventually found remains of at least 55 bodies. News media from all over the country flocked to the Panhandle and eagerly followed her work.

Scientific inquiry requires objectivity and professional detachment, but this wasn’t about dinosaur bones or pots and pans from some ancient civilization. Kimmerle frankly addresses her emotional reaction to

the horrors revealed by the White House Boys. Besides the beatings and deaths, she tells of visiting a dank basement called “the rape room” with one survivor.

“This was my job, to find the missing, to search for graves and to excavate the bones of those who didn’t survive,” she wrote. “To be good at this job — to be really good at it — passion and empathy must guide the way... To seek the truth but find such horror, to search for a grave and then hold the crumbling bones of a child in your hand.”

Her book has an appendix naming 46 people “positively and presumptively identified” by her research. In her final chapter she movingly begins each paragraph with the words “We remember,” noting that 20 boys died within the first three months they were at Dozier — and half of those died in the first 30 days.

Black boys were most of the school’s population, and they were statistically more likely to be punished in “sweat boxes” — where one boy died in 1944. She remembers that at least 22 kids died with no burial location or cause of death recorded.

“We remember that the Dozier school is but one institution within a system structured to define people by color and class,” she wrote, “a system designed to accept that some people are just ‘throwaways.’”

Bill Cotterell is a retired Tallahassee Democrat capitol reporter. He can be reached at bcotterell@tallahassee.com