

A Culture of Incompetence

by Julian Sereno

Among all the social and cultural trends that have been roiling our country recently, the one that's getting the least attention might be the most profound — on-the-job incompetence. It has figured in everything from the wife-beaters on the White House staff to our greatest tragedies, including the mass shootings at the First Baptist Church in Southerland Springs, Texas and at Marjorie Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida.

Let's start with the White House wife beaters. The Staff Secretary resigned after one of his ex-wives released a photo of herself with a big black eye and another ex-wife echoed her claims of abuse. A speechwriter resigned for the same reason. Trump defended them.

Chief of Staff General John Kelly, who defended the Secretary, subsequently said he had been uninformed of the allegations. The FBI contradicted him, said they found out the Secretary had been busted for violating a restraining order when they conducted a background check, and denied him a security

clearance. They sent a report to the White House months earlier.

Nobody read it, I presume, because nobody in the Trump White House reads much of anything, or anything much longer than a Presidential Tweet. The FBI reports on the wife beaters sat unread for months as Team Trump waited on the security clearance that never came. They are utterly incompetent. Unwilling or unable or just too lazy to read, or even scan the reports that inundate them, they are not performing the tasks that their jobs require.

After the FBI outed Kelly, he asked them to "red flag" any similar reports, i.e., tell him which reports he should actually read.

The mass murderer at the First Baptist Church of Southerland Springs, Texas, had been court martialed in for assaulting his wife and child and spent 12 months behind bars. As a convicted felon he should not have been able to buy the Ruger assault rifle he used to murder the 26 parishioners. But the Air Force never informed the FBI National Database. Evidently neither the Air Force nor the Defense Department ever bothered to report their released

felons to the FBI data base.

We'll learn more. Survivors are filing suit against the Air Force, and at least one is suing the U.S. Department of Defense. One claim, filed by her son Roland Ramsey reads:

"Simply put, Therese Rodriguez's death was caused, in whole or in part, by the institutional failures of the United States Department of Defense, including, but not limited to, the United States Air Force. These entities negligently, recklessly, carelessly, and/or egregiously failed."

Egregious failure is a good way to describe the manifold blunders of FBI and the Broward County Sheriff's Department at that led to the mass murder at Marjorie Stoneman Douglas High School.

The FBI got a tip that a profoundly disturbed, angry 19-year-old was threatening to shoot up his high school and failed to act on it. This more than a month before the shooting. The same FBI that asks citizens to keep their eyes and ears open and report suspicious behavior to their tip line, 1-800-CALLFBI. The FBI acknowledged their mistake: "Protocols

were not followed," said an FBI bigwig.

Concerning the Broward County Sheriff's Department, it received 45 calls about the shooter and his brother between 2008 and 2017, according to CNN. The Sheriff, Steve Israel, demanded a retraction; he said it was only 23 calls. This is the man who praised himself for "amazing leadership" after 17 students and teachers were slaughtered under his watch. Concerning the school resource officer who stayed outside and failed to enter the building where the shooting was going on, I can't say if he was following procedure or frozen with fear. I can only say with certainty that he failed, as did his self-congratulatory boss.

What unites all these incompetent bunglers, from the White House to the Air Force and Defense Department to the FBI and Broward County Sheriff's Department? None of them are going to miss a paycheck no matter how horribly they failed. Except for the school resource officer, and he decided to take early retirement.

Julian Sereno is editor and publisher of Chatham County Line.

Black History Month

by Don Lein

Famed black economist Walter E. Williams states that Carter G. Woodson, noted scholar, created "Negro History Week" in 1926, which was extended in 1976 to Black History Month. Woodson chose February since it was the birthday of both Frederick Douglass, famed abolitionist, and Abraham Lincoln who freed the slaves, both of whom were, of course, Republicans. Williams goes on to assert that black Americans, as a group, have made the greatest gains, over some of the highest hurdles, in a shorter span of time than any other racial group in mankind's history!

For evidence, he points out that totaled black income would rank black Americans as the 20th richest nation in the world. Colin Powell was Chair of the Joint Chiefs of Staff heading up the world's most formidable military force and there are a number of black Americans who rank among the richest and most well-known personalities in the world. Williams opines that in 1865 this kind of growth/acceptance would have been improbable and certainly impossible anywhere other than the U.S. He believes that accentuating the positives rather than focusing on the negatives would be the far superior course for black Americans.

From the late 1800s until the 1950s some black schools outscored white schools in standardized tests even though being underfunded in run-down buildings, having very used textbooks and with 40-50 students in a classroom. These were not children of the black elites, but were from parents who were domestics, manual laborers, maintenance men, etc. "Experts" tell us that in order to achieve academic excellence today we need big budgets, small class size and integrated classes. Successful black schools such as Dunbar in Washington, DC, Frederick Douglass in Baltimore, Atlanta's Booker T. Washington, among others, belie those claims. Unfortunately, today, employing today's educational techniques, Douglass has only 9

percent of students proficient in English and 3 percent in math; Dunbar has 12 percent proficient in reading and 5 percent in math, Washington has 20 percent proficient in English and 18 percent in Math.

Williams believes the cause of today's disappointing results derive from today's parent's toleration of grossly disrespectful, violent behavior that presently is the norm at many black schools. If parents required the same kind of behavior that prevailed prior to 1950, Williams suggests that the outcomes would reflect that. Is all hope lost?? No, fortunately there are innovators such as Eva Moskowitz, founder of Success Academy, which has a group of charter schools in New York City. A majority of Eva's students, chosen by lottery, are very poor, with 1 in 10 being homeless, yet 97 percent passed the state math exam and 84 percent passed reading — not only outperforming the government schools in the city, but also outperforming all the wealthy suburban schools!!

In spite of opposition by teachers' unions and their Democrat partners, Eva has proven "There is nothing wrong with the children". She states "There is something wrong with a system, a monopolistic system that is not allowing kids to succeed." Eva has found "Kids like succeeding", and has lengthened the school day until 4:30 p.m., saying "We need to toughen up", adding "China and India are not worrying about the length of the school day." Unfortunately, in places where teacher's unions and Democrats run the school systems "kids succeeding" is not a priority and shorter work hours are!!

Even in schools where children are provided a chance to succeed, what are they taught?? There was a recent Rand Corporation study on "truth decay" which blurs the "line between fact and fiction in American public life". As former Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan opined "Everyone is entitled to his own opinion, but not his own facts." However, how are students to distinguish the two with the flurry of information

and misinformation available on social media coupled with the human tendency to "seek out information that confirms preexisting beliefs and rejects information that challenges those beliefs". The fourth estate that used to be a relatively unbiased commentator, has taken sides and "fake news" and slanted news abound. Are we training our youngsters to be able to deal with it? Is real history being taught?? Are students being taught to do "critical thinking"? Are students being taught to do interpretation without the appropriate factual bases? There is a ray of hope, the federal Department of Education may have time to evaluate these weighty matters since they no longer are using their valuable time investigating transgender bathroom complaints.

If today's students were to meet Sojourner Truth, Frederick Douglass or Harriett Tubman, et. al., whom we honor during February would they reject their republican beliefs, simply because they do not conform to today's political correctness as espoused by the main street media or taught in today's education bureaucracy. Are we providing them with enough of a knowledge base so that they can develop and use critical thinking skills. Williams laments that "the blood sweat and tears of our ancestors to make today's educational opportunities available" are not fully being taken advantage of. While the progress blacks have made in the U. S. has been great, it will not continue unless black parents and leaders insist upon quality education for their children, which, among other things, means factual history rather than truth decay/politically correct opinions. The raw material that made Douglass, Dunbar and other black schools great is still there. Are we going to "toughen up" like Eva Moskowitz or follow the primrose path with the teacher's unions and their politically correct agenda?

Don Lein is a regular contributor to Chatham County Line. A Chatham resident, he is involved in a variety of civic organizations.

Breathing Space and the Public Person

by Jeff Davidson

In 1988, I was invited by a friend to attend a Democratic fund raising reception for a congressional candidate, running in Northern Virginia. The reception was to be held at the home of Ethel Kennedy in McLean, VA. I was eager to attend, although skeptical that the reception would actually be held in Mrs. Kennedy's home. I felt certain it would be held in the back yard, or in a special tent on grounds that were meticulously groomed for the event.

To my surprise, the event was held in her home and the hundreds of people who attended apparently were free to roam about the first floor without restriction. I found this to be totally amazing. Here was a home, that by any measure, contained artifacts which future generations would clamor to see.

HISTORY AND POP CULTURE ON DISPLAY

Every room contained personal photos of Bobby Kennedy, Jack Kennedy, Jackie Kennedy, Ted Kennedy and the entire clan, as well as awards, citations, and personal mementos. Guests could have pocketed their choice of mementos at any time. Apparently none did — at any time. More astounding, Mrs. Kennedy seemed completely unconcerned about the possibility.

As I strode about the grounds, I made my way to the pool house. Between a couch and a chair, on a phone stand, along with the phone, was a roster of phone numbers typed and inserted in a plastic sleeve. I looked at the list. Ted Kennedy's congressional phone number and his private number in Hyannis were listed. Jackie Kennedy's personal phone number in New York was listed.

Other family members, celebrities' and luminaries' personal phone numbers were listed. The paparazzi or any reporter could have cashed in simply by copying the numbers on the list and selling them to the tabloids.

This back yard, this yard, this house, on a typical street in McLean, VA had no fences, no guard dogs, none of what I would have expected the widow of a historical figure — a millionairess — to have.

A PUBLIC PERSON

Ethel Kennedy was, you see, a public person, circa 1988, before the inherent meanness that the Internet invites. I thought about all the time and energy that I, and most of the people I know, spend to safeguard our privacy, to ensure no one is looking over our shoulder when we're doing something as simple as

reading a newspaper on an airplane. It seemed inconceivable that someone such as Ethel Kennedy could be so open and people-oriented, and not need the barriers and protectors that most of us believe we need.

As that night's affair ended, I marveled when Ethel Kennedy stood at the door and bade all guests a fond farewell. She shook my hand and thanked me for coming as if I had been one of the Democratic Party's most staunch supporters and honored guests in her home (although I am a life-long registered independent.)

After the encounter, I realized that one of the greatest secrets to having an overabundance of breathing space in one's life might be to occasionally let down one's guard. Like Ethel Kennedy, to the degree that you can, invite hundreds of strangers to your home and not give it a second thought.

Jeff Davidson of Raleigh is a regular contributor to Chatham County Line. He is "The Work-Life Balance Expert®", the premier thought leader on work-life balance issues, Jeff is the author of 65 books, among them Breathing Space, Dial it Down, Live it Up, Simpler Living, 60 Second Innovator, and 60 Second Organizer. Visit www.BreathingSpace.com

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