

OPINION PAGES

Our VIEW

Graham vs. Goliath

One person can be an instrument of change

On March 28, a man died. He wasn't terribly famous. Millions didn't mourn his death, and flags didn't fly at half mast. But he proved one person can effect significant change, and we think he ranks among the greatest role models of the 20th century. The man was Henry V. Graham, the National Guard general who told Alabama Gov. George C. Wallace that he would have to step aside from his "stand in the schoolhouse door" on June 11, 1963. That "stand" was Wallace confronting federal authorities at the University of Alabama in Montgomery when they tried to enroll two black students, James Hood and Vivian Malone. Wallace stood with his arms stiff at his sides and declared, "Segregation now, segregation tomorrow, segregation forever."

Graham informed the governor he would have to enroll the students. He stood up to the governor's hatred in that doorway.

It wasn't the first time Graham, one man, had made a difference. In 1961, he and the National Guard had helped calm a white mob when Freedom Riders arrived at a Montgomery bus station. In 1965, he and some guardsmen escorted voting rights marchers from Selma to Montgomery. A few weeks before, the marchers had been gassed and clubbed on Bloody Sunday.

Within a decade of Graham's showdown in the doorway, Wallace's tune had changed. Ten years later, he crowned Terry Points as the university's first black homecoming queen. In 1991, he said in an interview he regretted his stance against integration.

After that "stand in the schoolhouse door," Wallace remained a political legend, mounting a significant bid for president in 1972. When he died Sept. 13, 1998, his body was laid in state in the Alabama Capitol.

Meanwhile, Graham left the limelight and was a real estate dealer in Birmingham before his death in a local nursing home.

Often, it doesn't seem that one person out of the limelight can make a difference.

It doesn't seem as if one student's work towards diversity and cultural understanding could accomplish much. And it doesn't seem that one teacher changing his or her course material to better reflect the diversity of our world and nation will leave a lasting mark.

Graham proved that David still can slay Goliath. He showed that a person who does the right thing, making small steps towards recognizing humanity and human rights, will eventually accomplish a great feat.

He was the first to make Wallace step aside of his anti-segregation stance. Graham won a significant battle in the war on racism.

Graham should be celebrated as a political hero; he should be remembered by future generations and historians.

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Babin's VIEW



DN LETTERS

Show me love

Take a moment to think about the definition of family Jessica Flanagan ("Failing Families," DN, April 1) promotes as the ideal. "An enduring commitment between a man and a woman." Isn't it odd love doesn't necessarily need to be a part of her equation? A loveless commitment that endures, say, for the sake of the children or because a woman can't bring herself to leave her abusive husband still fits in Flanagan's otherwise narrow definition. But who would say it is an ideal situation?

I'm tired of people citing studies that link fatherless families to an array of societal ills and automatically associating the results with gay and lesbian parents. Most likely, the conditions these studies report are caused less by the absence of a live-in father and more by issues of abandonment and the limited resources (not only of money, but time and attention, etc.) of the remaining parent.

Stuart Kujath loves his gay mom. Presumably, his gay mom loves Stuart. If Stuart is raised in an environment where he knows he is loved and valued for who he is, his future is not as dim as Flanagan suggests.

Dave Gilsdorf
alumnus
class of 1991

Wake up

I'd like to take a moment to offer some advice to the enlightened socio-political policy fools that have graced the opinion pages with their thoughts in the last few days. To Mr. Rempe and Mr. Ferate, and to all those who have likewise expressed such bold sentiments as have been shared by these fellows, I offer a suggestion: Any time you would like to join the real world, please feel free.

Having hashed my way through the oblique and semi-literate arguments the two of you have put forth, I find myself unwilling to take either of you too seriously. Mr. Ferate, exactly

where did you come up with such Neolithic, homophobic tripe? It is an unfortunate fact that your position in such a "powerful" organization as the College Republicans lends you the automatic authority to spout stereotypical hatreds, thereby eroding public confidence in the political party with which you are unfortunately affiliated.

And Mr. Rempe, exactly why do you debase your justified outrage at such ludicrous suggestions by frothing at the mouth at the Evil Conservative Caucasian Conspiracy? Every rational person on the campus knows Mr. Ferate was expressing anachronistic hate propaganda. Exactly how that translates into the equally ridiculous assertion on your part that it is conservatives who are the Great Satan is as much a mystery

as Mr. Ferate's blathering.

I am a deeply conservative Republican. I believe the Great Society programs of our parents and grandparents are in desperate need of overhaul. To look at me, you would judge me to be a Caucasian. Based on these statements, Mr. Ferate and Mr. Rempe would presumably both conclude I am part of the "extreme right wing," as Mr. Rempe puts it. They would therefore be making the same error — one born from the same sort of close-minded intellectual superiority shared by both men. You see, gentlemen, as is the case for intellectual adults who reside in the real world, my political beliefs are the result of careful consideration and personal experience. The Great Society programs, in my opinion, require renovation because our country can no longer afford the fiscal abuses of these systems I myself have seen. I am well aware of the danger any such changes would present for those who rely on these programs to get back on their feet. However, I believe the need to end their abuse is greater than the risk to a few who would otherwise benefit from the programs in question.

It is the careful consideration of both the pros and the cons of each political opinion that separates empowered citizens of this country from the rote recitation of stereotypical sound bytes, which you two have been spewing in these pages over the last few days. In the future, I would ask that you consider your opinions before you dispense them from on high. If you cannot find the weaknesses in what you are about to say, then perhaps you should seriously evaluate whether those opinions are your own — and, therefore, whether you wish to espouse them.

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