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OUR VIEW: COVID-19

Get vaccinated for your community

Vermont says more than 80 percent of its eligible residents have received at least one dose of a coronavirus vaccine. New York has topped 70 percent.

Big state, small state, it matters little: They outstrip Minnesota, a state that justly prides itself on its record of civic participation, in this simple enhancement of public health.

Why it matters:

The vaccination rate — in Minnesota and in the nation — has slowed to a crawl.

The low-hanging fruit of vaccination has been picked, both in Minnesota and in the nation at large. The people who really wanted to get the shot have gotten the shot. Those wary of the the vaccines remain stubbornly difficult to entice. And that leaves the “herd immunity” goal of 70% inoculation out of reach.

To be sure, Minnesota isn't doing poorly. The Gopher State ranks 15th among states in the percentage that has been fully vaccinated (two weeks past the final dose), according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. But being better than West Virginia, Alabama and Mississippi isn't the goal.

Walk the aisles of Mankato supermarkets and big box stores and you might think we're in Vermont territory in vaccination rates. The idea is that one can go maskless if fully vaccinated; if not, face coverings are expected. Off the CDC figures, about half of us should be masked in public indoor places. But a lot of people are implicitly lying about their vaccination status.

This is unfortunate. The combination of cooperative weather and vaccines has driven down both new cases and positive test rates. For now, the unvaccinated are getting a free ride.

But that can change. COVID-19 has not been fully quashed even in well-vaccinated areas of this nation, and certainly continues to rage in parts of the planet where vaccines are scarcer than in the United States. Allowing the virus to circulate is to allow it to continue to mutate and generate new variants.

It shouldn't need to be repeated, but it does: Vaccinations are good for individuals, and they are good for the broader community. Skipping the jab does no good for anybody. If you haven't gotten vaccinated, please get the shot.

OTHER VIEW

Hotbeds of sedition

South Florida Sun Sentinel

Congratulations, Florida. We've done it.

After months of lagging behind Texas, we've finally caught up and are now tied with the Lone Star State in number of people arrested in connection with the Jan. 6 riot in the Capitol.

That's according to tracking by the Sarasota Herald-Tribune, which has the number of arrestees in each state at 47.

They say everything's bigger in Texas, but not, apparently, when it comes to disloyalty to the country.

Who knows but that we might even surpass Texas by the weekend? We'll be no. 1 with a bullet if we keep making it easy on the FBI, like, say, posing with a lectern taken from Nancy Pelosi's office and waving at a camera or posting on Instagram that the riot was “our Boston Tea Party” or taking it to Facebook Live while in the middle of a violent confrontation with Capitol Police or organizing with your fellow Proud Boys before entry to the hallowed halls of Congress.

To what do we attribute Florida's tendency toward degeneracy? Certainly, we can write off a lot of it to population — Florida's a big

state, and statistically, we're just going to have more lawbreakers. But the other most-populous states, no. 1 California and no. 4 New York, don't have the number of Capitol riot arrestees found in the Lone Star and Sunshine states.

But one thing Florida and Texas have that California and New York do not: Congressmen like Florida's Louie Gohmert, who were among just 21 Republicans in the House who voted Wednesday against awarding the Congressional Gold Medal to the officers who defended Congress during the attack. Governors like Ron DeSantis, who has pushed voting restrictions in response to the Big Lie that Donald Trump won the 2020 election, and Greg Abbott, who has pushed the lie himself and whose attorney general filed a lawsuit to try to reverse the election results.

The rot of lies and conspiracy theories that led to the Capitol riot began with Trump and his false claims of election fraud, perpetuated by his followers among Republican leadership around the country. Is it so surprising that the voters who put faith in them actually believe what they say?

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The Free Press

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Why I never got to say good-bye

Many years ago, my father informed me that human beings think about death, on average, every seven seconds. I don't know if this was ever true, but it has certainly been true for me the past several days.

On average, for the last week or so, a friend or acquaintance seems to have passed away every few days.

Three funerals in a week sounds like a reductive movie title, but it applies. Grief and mourning were becoming so routine that I was beginning to understand the widows of the Spanish Civil War, who dressed head-to-toe in black for the rest of their days. These then-elderly women were still plentiful in the early 1970s when I was a student in Valencia, as were the blind veterans who sold pencils on street corners alongside national guardsmen who wore tri-cornered, patent-leather hats and toted semiautomatic weapons.

Franco's oppressive military regime perhaps helps explain the widows' lifelong commitment to sorrow and their loyalty to the dead.

Recently, I had just committed my own black dress to the back of the closet, hoping not to see it again for a long while, when a message from a stranger appeared on my Facebook account. “You were the last to comment on her page, so I thought I'd give you a heads-up,” wrote Luke, who identified himself as the nephew of my closest childhood friend — Pamela Lewis Kinsey.

“She went peacefully and on her

own terms after a long (and Pam-esquely private) fight with cancer,” Luke wrote.

I'd lost a beloved goddaughter and an acquaintance who died suddenly from an aneurysm, as well as a daughter/sister of other friends. But losing one of my oldest friends, one whom I considered a best friend, was a crippling quadruple blow.

In my last comment on Pam's page, I had written: “Thinking of you and wondering where/ how you are!?” That was on Feb. 5. I've no idea whether my message to Pam coincided with her decision to remain silent about her cancer, but she never responded either on Facebook or to me directly. The last time I saw her was a decade ago in New York, where I was living at the time.

I knew exactly what Luke meant by “Pam-esque.” She was idiosyncratic at birth — and private except to her very closest friends. I knew that she liked to sleep without pajamas under piles of comforters with the air conditioner set to freezing. I knew that she was smart, if not especially studious, and that she was an avid tennis player. One day after high school, she ran south from our hometown of Winter Haven, Florida, with a tennis pro before deciding to trek back north to college at Smith. Her first job was at the New Yorker, where, she said, she mostly made summer camp arrangements for her boss's children. (True to form, Pam never disclosed his or her name.)

She was quiet. When she did talk,

she spoke in a husky near-whisper. She loved solitude and books, which is probably what bonded us. Her parents were sophisticated and provided an open home that was loosely slipcovered, happy with dogs, and a refuge for me beginning at age 9. Her sister, Jenny, rode bareback on her pony, a streak of long blond hair flying through the orange grove in which their lakeside house was nestled.

These are my early memories. During the rest of our lives, Pam and I touched base here and there, and then, separated by geography, got busy again. Always, I think we both considered the other best of friends. So why didn't I know she was sick? Why didn't she tell me? Why didn't I push?

I think I understand how one might wish to control the uncontrollable by holding death close in a private space, apart from the ordinary and the inevitable questions that one can't answer. But not sharing is its own form of cruelty. Not allowing loved ones to prepare themselves, to say goodbye in some way, deprives us of the gift of ultimate giving.

During that dinner 10 years ago, as we sprinted through decades in a hasty attempt to “catch up,” I wish I'd listened more intently, delved more deeply. And vowed to stay closer. To a sick and dying Pam, a casual poke on social media probably felt like little more than a box checked. We were obviously in different places, and I didn't know. I can say only this with certainty: I won't make that mistake again.

The cultural contradiction of our schools

WASHINGTON — In 1976, Daniel Bell dampened, as much as a sociologist could, the nation's bicentennial celebration by postulating “The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism.” The system's success, he said, undermines its cultural prerequisites. It produces affluence that subverts the virtues that capitalism requires — thrift, industriousness, deferral of gratification. Forty-five years later, with government conscripting much of society's resources, and redistributing them to please clamorous factions and to slake a middle-class nation's appetite for entitlements, Bell's thesis looks prescient.

Now Kay S. Hymowitz warns about “the cultural contradictions of American education.” She is rightly, but insufficiently, alarmed.

Writing in National Affairs, she says America's middle class demands K-12 education that cultivates and celebrates each child's individuality. Yet the middle class also expects schools to instill this class's values — accountability, diligence, civility, self-control — “that are often in direct tension with students' autonomy and individuality.”

The fact that Dutch babies on average sleep through the night at earlier ages than American babies “illuminates a little-understood realm of American exceptionalism.” Dutch parents believe in “regularity and rest.” Middle-class American parents tend to think that babies “know” when they are tired, and how much sleep they need. “Dutch infants,” Hymowitz says, “at six months of age, get an average of two hours more sleep per day than do their self-regulating American counterparts.”

For most of human history, in most places, parents and the community collaborate in turning initially uncivi-

lized children into capable citizens of societies that have rules and expectations. Hymowitz quotes a mother raising children in Paris as saying that French children are considered small human beings who need to be “formatted” by placing “disciplines such as manners and mathematics above creativity and expression.”

“In other cultures, both East and West,” Hymowitz writes, “parents prize manners and ritualized courtesies over the child's self-expression. The French teach their two-year-olds to say ‘bonjour, madame’ or ‘monsieur’ in every encounter.” Such “ritualized greetings strike Americans as artificial and a worrying sign of an overly programmed child.”

They are artificial. As is civilization.

A popular American child-rearing manual, “What to Expect: The Toddler Years,” warns that “children who are nagged about their manners or are punished for not saying ‘thank you’ or for not using a fork ... won't feel positive about manners.” Hymowitz is not saying that American parents are indifferent to manners, or that “American-style individualism” is “altogether noxious.” It does, however, underscore the cultural contradiction of U.S. education: What Hymowitz calls the “creativity craze” is in tension with the need to instill habits and manners conducive to social cohesion.

U.S. employers increasingly complain about young workers “who have trouble getting to work on time, collaborating, communicating, and dealing with workplace discipline and authority,” Hymowitz says. Teachers who adopt the role of “guides on the side” flatter children (who are regularly flattered by their parents) but do not challenge what she calls the child's “natural egotism and

immaturity.” She says “personalized learning” is the newest departure from “the idea of education as a collective, social activity” — “a structured transmission of knowledge from one generation to the next.” When a classroom is “a teeming warehouse of options,” education becomes “a rummage sale of resources for enhancing individual meaning, identity, and creativity.”

This occupies educational space at the expense of such disciplines — the term is apposite — as history and mathematics, with their exacting chronologies and sequential mastery of increasingly complex material. As each student meanders down a “personalized learning path,” fake news and “alternative facts” flourish, and society frays.

Hymowitz wrote her essay long ago, in 2019, before the sudden permeation of K-12 education with politics in the form of an imposed racial orthodoxy (“systemic racism” and all that), with a dash of other progressive preoccupations (e.g., grade schoolers taught “gender fluidity”). These reductions of identity to group memberships are endorsed, and hence enforced in curriculum designs, and in teacher hiring and promotions. Similarly, when thousands of classrooms adopt the New York Times's 1619 Project, which asserts that white supremacy is encoded in the nation's DNA, such ideological pedagogy is necessarily presented not as a contestable interpretation but as an official orthodoxy.

So, there is a distinctively 2021 cultural contradiction of K-12 education: Pupils who are assumed to be unfolding flowers of spontaneous individuality are nevertheless treated as empty vessels into which government-approved political doctrines should be poured. In 2022, multitudes of parents are going to take their anger about all this to polling places.



GEORGE WILL

Washington Post