

VIEWPOINTS

Yes Megyn, there is a Santa Claus

It all started when Slate published an article by writer Aisha Harris about how weird it is to grow up as a black child and only see Santa Claus as a white man.

I'll admit that's a fair, thought-provoking point, especially since I'm a native South Dakotan and virtually was never around any people of color until I began attending college – and even then, the population of non-Caucasian students was VERY much in the minority.

Slate gave Harris' piece this headline: "Santa Claus Should Not Be a White Man Anymore."

As a child, it was easy for me to accept Santa as being white. Admit it, when you were a little kid, you probably never gave the color of his skin a second thought, either.

A black woman having the audacity to suggest that the way we view Santa should change was just too much for the talking heads at Fox News.

Fox anchor Megyn Kelly debated this hot breaking news issue and kicked off proceedings, according to video clips I've seen, by stating the scientific fact that "Santa just IS white. Santa is what he is. I just wanted to get that straight." She then added: "Jesus was a white man, too," suggesting Kelly doesn't know that much about the history of Jesus.

Kelly's claims attracted much attention, from both supporters and detractors. For the latter, Jon

BETWEEN THE LINES



DAVID LIAS
david.lias@plaintalk.net

Stewart pointed out that Kelly's ringing argument – "Just because it makes you feel uncomfortable doesn't mean it has to change" – might as well be the motto for oppression. On the other side, Rush Limbaugh stepped up for Kelly, describing Santa Claus as part of "American history" – and making the truly definitive point that Santa is white because that's how he appears in Coca-Cola ads.

There's a good chance you may not have even heard about this kerfuffle, or if you did, you wisely chose to ignore it. And, I'll apologize right now for bringing it up, because it is such a non-issue.

Like Santa, I've been keeping a list this year – my "Things That Bother Me About the Christmas Season" list, and the debate over St. Nicholas' skin color is the latest addition.

Other things that bug me: Black Friday, joined by a new trend, Black Thursday (which used to be known as Thanksgiving), and how our focus on the Christmas season so easily is distracted to the least

important things, like that video of the fight that broke out in a Costco during a shopping riot over something as fleeting as yoga pants (which hopefully, by next Christmas, will be out of style).

Let me suggest that there is a teachable moment from Kelly's staunch stance on Santa's skin color. If we share her view – if we're seriously emphatic that he is white and *must remain* white, there's a good chance that our view of the rest of the world is just as limited and unimaginative.

Christmas, after all, is a time to take a cue from our kids with their boundless imaginations, who can easily picture the magical man who slides down our chimneys every Christmas Eve.

It is also a time of reassurance – to be reminded of what is truly real and abiding.

Eight-year-old Virginia O'Hanlon, plagued by doubt, was inspired to write a letter to the editor of New York's *Sun*, and the quick response was printed as an unsigned editorial Sept. 21, 1897. The work of veteran newsman Francis Pharcellus Church has since become history's most reprinted newspaper editorial, appearing in part or whole in dozens of languages in books, movies, and other editorials, and on posters and stamps.

"DEAR EDITOR: I am 8 years old.

"Some of my little friends say there is no Santa Claus.

"Papa says, 'If you see it in THE SUN it's so.'

"Please tell me the truth; is there a Santa Claus?"

"VIRGINIA O'HANLON.
"115 WEST NINETY-FIFTH STREET."

VIRGINIA, your little friends are wrong. They have been affected by the skepticism of a skeptical age. They do not believe except they see. They think that nothing can be which is not comprehensible by their little minds. All minds, Virginia, whether they be men's or children's, are little. In this great universe of ours man is a mere insect, an ant, in his intellect, as compared with the boundless world about him, as measured by the intelligence capable of grasping the whole of truth and knowledge.

Yes, VIRGINIA, there is a Santa Claus. He exists as certainly as love and generosity and devotion exist, and you know that they abound and give to your life its highest beauty and joy. Alas! how dreary would be the world if there were no Santa Claus. It would be as dreary as if there were no VIRGINIAS. There would be no childlike faith then, no poetry, no romance to make tolerable this existence. We should have no enjoyment, except in sense and sight. The eternal light with which childhood fills the world

would be extinguished.

Not believe in Santa Claus! You might as well not believe in fairies! You might get your papa to hire men to watch in all the chimneys on Christmas Eve to catch Santa Claus, but even if they did not see Santa Claus coming down, what would that prove? Nobody sees Santa Claus, but that is no sign that there is no Santa Claus. The most real things in the world are those that neither children nor men can see. Did you ever see fairies dancing on the lawn? Of course not, but that's no proof that they are not there. Nobody can conceive or imagine all the wonders there are unseen and unseeable in the world.

You may tear apart the baby's rattle and see what makes the noise inside, but there is a veil covering the unseen world which not the strongest man, nor even the united strength of all the strongest men that ever lived, could tear apart. Only faith, fancy, poetry, love, romance, can push aside that curtain and view and picture the supernal beauty and glory beyond. Is it all real? Ah, VIRGINIA, in all this world there is nothing else real and abiding.

No Santa Claus! Thank God! he lives, and he lives forever. A thousand years from now, Virginia, nay, ten times ten thousand years from now, he will continue to make glad the heart of childhood.

Capitol Notebook:

Joan Jett fiasco told us a lot about us

By Bob Mercer
State Capitol Bureau

PIERRE – We sent the world quite a message with Joan Jett.

We could have promoted South Dakota as a place of tolerance and inclusion.

We could have said, "She doesn't eat meat, but we grow great food period in South Dakota. Rock on!"

Instead, we forced her off South Dakota's float in the Thanksgiving Day parade.

And then we got played as hicks again.

Some of the replacement musicians – Can you name them? I can't – turned out to be vegetarians, too.

What a joke. The bigger lesson is we need to think carefully about what we say South Dakota is.

We're headed toward a generational cliff. We don't have enough young people to replace the retiring people.

That's especially true in the ranks of professionals and craftsmen who make our economy go.

You see it on our Main Streets and dairy farms too.

The population segment with the greatest growth is young American Indians. But the academic gap is deep, and we have blown through another generation without addressing it.

The reservations don't have jobs, while places such as Aberdeen and Mitchell can't get workers enough.

Our Republican administration in state government refuses to expand Medicaid to cover lower-income workers.

Young people, especially those less educated, tend to be lower-income workers.

The Democratic Party and labor organizations put a measure on the 2014 statewide ballot to raise the minimum wage.

Democrats are so weak that ballot measures are one of the few ways they can exercise any power in South Dakota.

The Republican Party is determined to win the U.S. Senate seat in 2014 as Tim Johnson retires. He is the last Democrat holding a statewide elected office in South Dakota.

Other states legalize gay marriage. I struggle to understand that desire. I also struggle to understand why South Dakota allows marriage only between a man and a woman.

We're a long way from New Hampshire and "Live Free or Die."

Think about what we're saying. South Dakota is polarized and closed. And we're not even talking weather.

So it isn't any wonder, really, that Gov. Dennis Daugaard came up short with his plan to recruit families and workers to move to South Dakota.

I look at my own life. I'm glad as parents we were able to raise our family here.

I understand why our daughter moved to the brighter lights in another state where she is carving the first steps of a career.

But I think her life could be just as fulfilling here, if in different ways.

Money, excitement and nice apartments are great attractors for many young people. Are we sending any messages about those things?

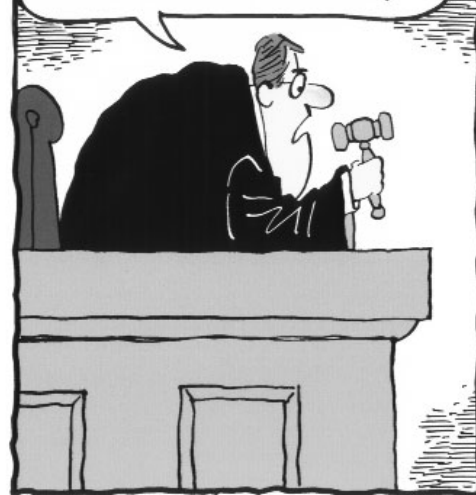
For a decade or more, tuition and fees went up and up at our state universities, and in recent years our technical institutes have gone the same path.

We built the university centers at Rapid City and Sioux Falls and Pierre but we didn't price them affordably.

We have a tuition freeze coming next academic year. But when do we hold the sale?

A sale, people understand.

I CANNOT IMAGINE A MORE INDISCRIMINATE AND ARBITRARY INVASION THAN THIS SYSTEMATIC AND HIGH TECH COLLECTION AND RETENTION OF PERSONAL DATA ON VIRTUALLY EVERY SINGLE CITIZEN FOR PURPOSES OF QUERYING AND ANALYZING IT WITHOUT PRIOR JUDICIAL APPROVAL!



Do you hear what I hear?

"What we most need is to hear within us the sound of earth crying." Thich Nhat Hanh, teacher and author

For some weeks now, hundreds of Canada geese have inhabited an area of open water on our lake. After more than a month of sub-freezing temperatures, that spot should be frozen over, like the rest of the oxbow. They really are making quite a scene with trademark honking, as sirens professing their force in numbers.

A vulnerable sight to behold, it's like watching an unruly boys' choir, screeching and teetering from on high in the church loft: All of those dark feathery physiques forming a zigzag of fluttering and splashing in the open pool.

"Must be a natural spring," was my amateur reasoning to a local naturalist. I figured it must be so, since several such springs were identified in a geological study years ago. "Or, I suppose the water could be deeper there," I pressed.

Attempting to calculate what had caused that solitary spot to not freeze, I flashed back through many years of dredging.

"Maybe both," I settled, trying to remember where those hardy leathery skinned boatmen had dug 30 feet into the lakebed and where they hit a shale-like sediment, preventing them from going more than 10 feet down.

"The geese keep the water open," was my naturalist friend's textbook response. "By staying together and their movement on the water prevents it from freezing."

MY STORY YOUR STORY



PAULA DAMON
paula.damon@iw.net

humankind can learn.

Alliances among humpback whales in Alaska bring together hunting their talents, according to an article titled "Animals Working Together" by Dan Tiley.

In groups of 20, Tiley reports, "the whales fill up on air at the surface, dive deep to locate their prey and begin to herd schools of fish upward."

Simultaneously, one whale remains below the surface, letting out a loud feeding cry, scaring the fish.

Meanwhile, two others swim toward the surface. Spiraling around the school as they go, they let out bubbles that trap the fish. "The whales then swim through the bubble ring and lunge for the mass amounts of fish as they break the ocean's surface."

Like geese and whales, many other animals cooperate to help increase

"Oh-h-h, I see." My eyes grew large at the notion of nature's instinctive ability to survive the elements.

"Really!" I marveled at the level of cooperation. Whether instinct or intellect, the animal kingdom provides many examples from which

their survival rate. Wolves hunt in packs of five to 10, depending on how many are in the area. Wolf packs stage ambushes in which one wolf serves as a decoy and the remainder sneaks up on the prey.

Pods of dolphins also surround schools of fish, corralling their prey in tight circles. Then, they take turns swimming through and feasting on the captured fish.

Female lions hunt for the pride by cooperating to catch dinner. Lionesses work together in groups that sneak around at night. Teaming up to surround their prey also decreases the possibility of being outrun by faster animals. Group hunting also makes it easier to trap and kill more powerful animals.

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Do you hear what I hear? SOURCES: "Animals That Work in Packs," Sheldon Reid, eHow Contributor; "Animals Working Together," Dan Tiley.

Vermillion



PLAIN TALK

Since 1884 • Official County, City and School District Newspaper

201 W. Cherry, Vermillion, SD 57069 • Publication No. USPS 657-720

Publisher: Gary Wood • Editor: David Lias

Published weekly by YANKTON MEDIA, Inc. • Periodicals postage paid at Vermillion, SD 57069.

Subscription rates for the Plain Talk by mail are \$27.56 a year in the city of Vermillion.

Subscriptions in Clay, Turner, Union and Yankton counties are \$41.34 per year.

Elsewhere in South Dakota, subscriptions are \$44.52, and out-of-state subscriptions are \$42.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Plain Talk, 201 West Cherry Street, Vermillion, SD 57069.

Vermillion Plain Talk Staff

News Staff: Travis Gulbrandson.

Advertising Director: Michele Schievelbein

Advertising Sales Rep: Carol Hohenhaner

Composing Manager: Kathy Larson

Composing Staff: Rob Buckingham, Mathew Wienbar & Sally Whiting.

Reception Office Manager: Sarah Hough

Distribution & Circulation Manager: Mike Hrycko