

Opinion

Free Press
Viewpoint



Our National Anthem deserves much better

We settled in to watch the NFL Championship battle between the Eagles and Bucs on Sunday afternoon. Prior to the kickoff, a huge American flag was brought onto the field to herald the singing of "The Star Spangled Banner." Sad. Very, very said.

One of the country's top pop singers, Jessica Simpson — doesn't ring a bell — did the honors. Or, in this case, the dishonors.

If that was *our* national anthem, we're in trouble. The girl sounded like she need help from the medical community. Stomach pains, or something like that. She screeched to reach the high notes that apparently weren't within her range. She butchered the song. And as the television cameras panned players along the sidelines, we noticed one was shaking his head "no."

There was no beauty to a beautiful song. There wasn't the thrill of excitement generally associated with the presentation of "The Star Spangled Banner." We wondered at what point in Simpson's rendition she was going to lift off into space.

Certainly Francis Scott Key (1779-1843), who wrote "The Star Spangled Banner" was scolding from his grave.

A friend watching the game, cautioned that perhaps we shouldn't be too hard on Jessica Simpson. "Times are changing and so is the way music of the past is presented," he said.

We thought that over for a minute, then responded. "We haven't noticed where they've tinkered with 'The Lord's Prayer.'" — *Tom (TD) Dreiling, Publisher*

About those letters . . .

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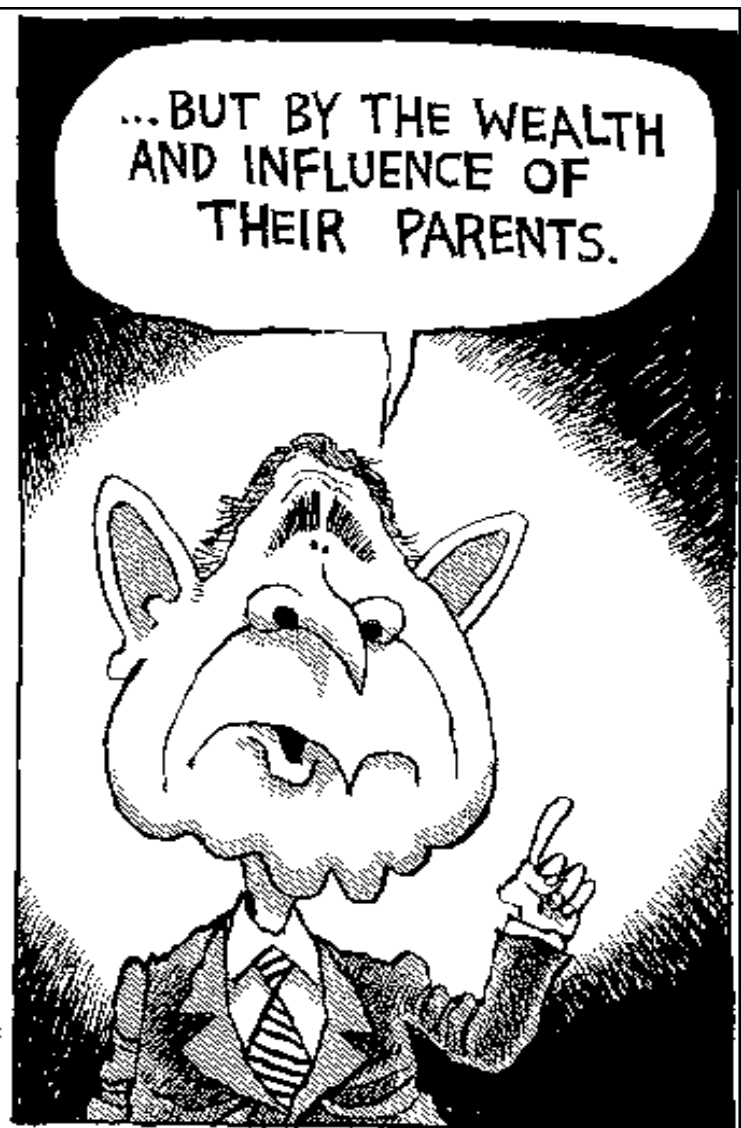
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Peeking into the past is interesting

I've been working on a series of "A Peek into the Past" columns, and have been perusing the *Rexford News* for 1942. Of course, I was a mere child of 10 in 1942, but some of the articles sparked some memories.

For instance, sugar rationing went into effect Feb. 1, 1942. I don't remember that it was much of a hardship, but maybe my parents saw to it that I got some of their sugar. And maybe I just didn't know any different. We did use some saccharine for sweetening.

I remember my folks buying molasses made from sorghum which had a very strong, bitter (to me) taste, and deciding to go without sweetening rather than to use it. If I remember correctly, the stalks were crushed, the juice extracted and boiled until it was thick. My father used it in his coffee, and maybe the taste of the coffee counteracted the molasses.

One night I met up with one of my schoolmates in town. She invited me to go around buying candy, and assured me that the bars usually had some. I'd never been in a bar before and thought it was delightfully wicked, but I was game. I don't think I cared about the candy; I was just thrilled to go into the bar. (I haven't made a practice of it since!)

We lived near a town with a prisoner of war camp nearby. I recall soldiers in uniform, but I didn't really know what was going on. There was



Maxine Nelson

• Random Thoughts

a woman who walked the streets in a fur coat. I thought she was very striking looking, and one day, in referring to her, I called her "Daddy's girl friend." My parents looked at me in shock! Where did I get that idea?

I guess someone must have jokingly referred to her in that way, and I took it seriously. My parents were not amused! (Ten-year-olds were more sheltered in those days than they are now.) After the war, she disappeared.

There was a shortage of men to work the fields during the war. My parents were farmers and hired some men from the prisoner of war camp. I was told to stay away from them, but my dad liked to visit with them, and could talk a little bit of German. Dad spoke fluent Swedish because both his parents came from Sweden. He said one of the prisoners was from Sweden, and had been caught in the military draft in Germany when the war broke out.

All United States male citizens between the ages of 20 and 44 were required to register for the draft beginning Feb. 18, 1942. They were to be subject to military service. Nobody in my immediate family has served in the military. My father was exempted from the draft for WW I because he was the only son of a widowed mother, and because he was a farmer, and was too old for WW II.

My uncles were all farmers during WW II. Both my grandfathers came from Germany to avoid the standing conscription. I think it is partly a matter of being in the right (or wrong) place at the right time.

Times have changed a lot since those days. Women certainly take a more active role in business and the community. I saw a quick interview on one of the morning shows recently, where four men and two women were asked if they thought women should also be subject to the draft. All six said yes.

It would have been unthinkable to draft women 60 years ago, or 50 years or 30 years, for that matter.

You've come a long way, baby. Do you like where you are at?

Maxine Nelson is a retired editor/reporter for the Free Press. She frequently contributes to this page.

Just who is NAFTA good for?

While celebrations are being held in Washington on the successes of the North American Free Trade Agreement's first ten years by the business elites and the ex-Presidents of Mexico, the United States and Canada who signed the international trade pact known as NAFTA into law in 1993 (Carlos Salinas, Bush Sr. and Brian Mulroney), mass demonstrations are taking place in Mexico to declare the Mexican countryside in a state of economic, social and environmental emergency.

Thousands of Mexican farmers and peasants have taken to the streets in Mexico City demanding a moratorium on NAFTA, provoked by the very real threats to their livelihoods when the tariffs on almost all agriculture products were reduced to zero on January 1, 2003.

Recently, the current president of Mexico, Vicente Fox, announced that the agriculture chapter of NAFTA would be renegotiated because of the serious crisis of the Mexican rural areas. But the following day, due to pressures of the U.S. embassy, warning the Mexican government that "if tariffs are frozen, there will be a violent response of U.S. producers." The Mexican government backed down. This statement of the agriculture advisor from the U.S. embassy was published in one of Mexico's daily newspapers, *La Jornada*, on December 13.

Now, it is necessary to clarify an important point. When U.S. officials refer to "U.S. farmers" they must be referring to huge agribusiness firms and commodity groups — the same "farmers" promoting trade and benefiting from trade. These "farmers" back U.S. agriculture policies that maintain family farmers in poverty across the globe, while allowing agribusiness to enjoy record profits of up to 300 percent since NAFTA, while taxpayers pay the price.

In fact, family farm organizations wholeheartedly support the actions and arguments that

Dena Hoff

• Another Take

Mexican farmers have presented over the last few weeks for several reasons:

1) Before NAFTA, trade experts predicted that NAFTA would create 170,000 U.S. jobs, while official figures show a loss of more than 1,000,000 jobs.

2) Experts predicted a trade surplus with Mexico of up to \$12 billion. In reality, in 2000 our trade balance with Mexico was negative \$24.2 billion.

3) Commodity prices are at record lows, while prices to consumers have risen by 20 percent.

4) Prices that Mexican farmers receive for their corn have fallen by 48 percent since NAFTA, and the value of other crops have also fallen. The only positive trade balance is for the Mexican products of beer, tequila and mescal.

Mexican farmers are unable to compete with U.S. imports because our farm policy unfairly sets the minimum price far below a farmer's cost of production whether in the United States or Mexico. In the United States, some of these losses are made up by payments made by taxpayers, not the companies that buy our commodities.

Take the case of corn. For Mexico, a corn-producing society, it is cheaper to buy mass-produced U.S. Cargill corn than to grow their own. Corn is exported to Mexico at prices below Mexico's cost of production, otherwise known as "dumping." However, if a farmer's only

source of income is selling their corn crop and they are unable to sell because of cheap Cargill corn in the Mexican market, they have no money to buy the imported corn, and no way to make a living.

Not so coincidentally, regions with the highest rates of poverty and thus migration are also primarily producers of basic grains.

The United States and Chile just signed a free trade agreement. The next agreements are with Singapore, then Central America. After that is the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) which will include all of Latin America and the Caribbean except for Cuba, set for 2005. All of these agreements include agriculture, based on the NAFTA model. What will become of our farm economy then?

What will become of the millions of small farmers throughout the entire Western Hemisphere who now are forced to compete with corporate agribusiness who receive millions in farm subsidies?

Food security is equivalent to national security. Agriculture cannot be considered as just another sector of the economy left at the mercy of the "free" market in efforts to maximize profit. Therefore, small farmers in Mexico are right to demand protection for their agriculture products and a revision of NAFTA.

We must demand the same. So next time you hear the words "free trade" and "national security" in the same sentence, ask yourself whose interests are truly represented.

Hoff is a farmer in Glendive, Montana. He chairs the Free Trade Task Force for the National Family Farm Coalition. The National Family Farm Coalition (NFFC) was founded in 1986 to serve as a link for organizations working on family farm issues. Visit: www.nffc.net <http://www.

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