

Opinion

A Kansas Viewpoint



Not everyone has access to the best

From The Hutchinson News
A new report showing that United States ranks near the bottom among modern nations on survival rate for newborn babies should rekindle the national debate about limited access to quality health care in our country.

Among 33 industrialized nations, the United States tied Hungary, Malta, Poland and Slovakia with a death rate of nearly five per 1,000 babies. Latvia recorded a death rate of six per 1,000 newborn infants.

Japan had the lowest newborn death rate, 1.8 per 1,000. Four countries — the Czech Republic, Finland, Iceland and Norway — tied for second place with two per 1,000 babies.

Save the Children compiled the rankings based on health data from countries and agencies worldwide.

Dr. Mark Schuster, a pediatrician with the University of California-Los Angeles, summed up the issue this way: The U.S. has invested in the most technologically advanced health care system in the world, but not everyone has access to the benefits of those new technologies.

Researchers found that about half a million U.S. babies are born prematurely each year. The data show that African-American babies are twice as likely as white infants to be premature, to have a low birth weight and to die at birth.

Other factors in the U.S. include teen pregnancies and obesity rates, which both disproportionately affect African-American women and also increase risk for premature births and low birth weights.

But the overriding difference between our country and other industrialized nations on newborn infants' survival rate remains the lack of universal access to quality health care in the U.S. That fact alone should rekindle the national debate about offering increased access to quality health care.

About those letters . . .

The *Free Press* encourages and welcomes letters from readers. Letters should be typewritten, if at all possible, and should include a telephone number and an address. Most importantly, all letters must include a signature.

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- U.S. Rep. Jerry Moran**, 2443 Rayburn House Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20515. 202/225-2715 or Fax 202/225-5124
- State Rep. Jim Morrison**, State Capitol Building, 303 SW 10th St. Rm. 171-W, Topeka 66612. 785/296-7676 e mail: jmorrison@ink.org web: www.ink.org/public/legislators/jmorrison
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Da Vinci Code is not worth the hype

For all the hype, the theatrical incarnation of "The Da Vinci Code" was mediocre at best.

It was not great but not really all that bad. I saw the film on its opening night Friday, and was neither disappointed nor overwhelmed by the film.

The novel by author Dan Brown is about the truth of the Holy Grail, and that it wasn't the cup of Christ. Instead, it deals with the fact Jesus was married to Mary Magdalene and they had children and a line of descendants that exists to this day.

The film, directed by Ron Howard, follows the novel closely, and takes only a few liberties for dramatic license. And, like the book, the pacing is about the same.

The book was a slow start, but picked up gradually, and the movie takes just as long to get to the point.

The first half of the film is spent trying to figure out a murder, and the rest on the run searching for the Grail, going from Paris to London to Scotland.

Tom Hanks plays Prof. Robert Langdon, a Harvard professor whose specialty is religious symbolism. He is called to the Louvre after the murder of the museum curator, and quickly becomes a suspect.

Rescued by a French cryptographer who has ties to the dead curator, the film becomes one chase after another.

The liveliest character in the movie was Grail expert Leigh Teabing, played by Ian McKellen. (He portrayed Gandalf in the "Lord of the Rings" trilogy and Magneto/Eric Lensherr in "X-Men" adaptations.)

I enjoyed seeing Paris and London, and the Louvre and the Mona Lisa should be a treat for viewers.



Tisha Cox

Off The Beaten Path

However, for all its style, the movie lacks substance. The novel is packed with many details about history and art, and Brown's intermixing of actual places and dates with his fictional premise has posed a problem for the casual reader.

Separating historical fact from fiction isn't easy, and for anyone who isn't well versed in art history, or the history of the church, they can get bogged down in the details. And Brown did change a few things to make them work for his book.

Also, Howard chose to remove much of the situation's gravity from the film. The book is fairly convincing in making the reader realize what's so important about the circumstances. Watching the film, I was never really convinced of the direness of the situation, or that the characters were even convinced that what they were doing was important.

If taken as what it is — a diversion — the book succeeds. As anything else, it falls short.

The movie is much the same. A good way to spend a couple of hours.

However, the controversy about Brown's assumptions about the Grail and his depiction of Opus Dei, which is a personal prelature of the Pope, are creating all the problems.

I know Brown isn't the first person to put for

the idea that the Grail wasn't the cup used by Christ at the last supper. But he is the one who succeeded in bringing the concept to a world-wide audience.

I understand the 1983 book "Holy Blood, Holy Grail" was one of the first. By authors Michael Baigent, Richard Leigh and Henry Lincoln, the non-fiction book is about the possibility that Jesus may not have died on the cross, and went on to marry and have children.

Brown's success, and the possibility he may have borrowed from their work didn't go unnoticed. He was sued earlier this year by Baigent and Leigh for plagiarism, but their efforts were unsuccessful.

Now that the movie is out, maybe the hype will finally die down.

I hope news outlets can go back to reporting the news and quit bringing up the subject of Brown and his novel.

Because it's just that — fiction. If Brown wanted to make a serious statement about the absence of and removal of the sacred feminine from history and Christianity, he should have done his research and written a non-fiction book on the subject.

I did hear a good argument last week before the movie came out. Someone on one news program pointed out the sacred feminine does exist in Christianity. Brown never once mentions the other Mary, Jesus' mother, and her importance.

It just proves the truth is there, if people are willing to seek it out.

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Are we isolated from reality?

In the 2004 presidential election, more than one-third of the electorate failed to vote. More than one-half of the 18 through 24 year olds failed to vote. Does a candidate who actually only won 34 percent of the eligible voters truly represent a majority?

Recently, California had a special election to fill the seat vacated by a disgraced Representative. Only 36 percent of the eligible voters participated. How many of those 36 percent actually studied the issues? How many of the 64 percent, that didn't vote, were even aware of the vacancy? The alarming thing to me concerning elections, is the very poor turnout of voters leaves the results vulnerable to a small percentage of single issue or special interest voters having a significant influence on the outcomes. These special or single issues decide our political and religious destiny without addressing the realities around us.

We are like the early morning jogger or walker I observed once. He had his ears covered with earmuffs. Those muffs may have kept his ears warm, but the wires leading from them may have been more important to the jogger. I presume he was listening to a recorded message or song. There is nothing wrong with listening to mes-

Ken Poland

Ken's World

sages or songs. But, were they a distraction? He had his mouth and nose covered with a mask. He was bundled up in heavy sweats. Essentially, he had isolated himself from reality. It was cold; there was traffic noise and moving activities all around him; all of which were potential threats to his safety.

Have we done the same in our daily lives? We go along oblivious to the political, religious and economic realities around us. We isolate ourselves from serious debate about world affairs. We shut out the discomforts of effectively dealing with political, economic, or religious issues.

We profess religion but we don't practice our faith. How can we when we don't bother to study all the real issues in our society, today? We put on our earmuffs and only listen to selective debate on issues that won't demand any changes within ourselves. How can we practice our faith when we don't know the real basis of our theol-

ogy or doctrines? We follow the lead of the world, "If it feels good, it must be good." If our faith makes us feel good, then it must be good. If our faith makes us feel uncomfortable (usually because we are not living up to it), then it is time to go shopping for another faith group or church. Or better yet, we expel those folks that make us uncomfortable, then we can go on in our serene and blissful comforts. It is never me that is at fault. It is always someone else.

We bundle ourselves up in protective covers to shut out the realities of life around us, much like that early morning jogger.

Nero fiddled while Rome burned. We jog, worship (Not only God, but, also in the sports arena.), live in the past with the Golden Oldies (both music and drama), and work two jobs or the welfare system to surround ourselves with things we don't need. And, meanwhile, our society burns.

I didn't observe any blinders on that jogger, so he could at least see what was ahead of him. But, I'm not so sure society can see what lies ahead.

Ken Poland is a Gem farmer who contributes to the Colby Free Press.

Doonesbury

• Gary Trudeau

