

from our viewpoint...

Gaza situation crazy to watch

However you look at it, the situation in Gaza is crazy. Opposing tribes are killing each other, as they have since the dawn of time in the Middle East, only now these "nations" have rockets, drone aircraft, tanks and high explosives.

Crazy. The militant Hamas group took over the Gaza strip last year, shooting, torturing and tossing from the roofs of high-rise buildings their more moderate opponents and former partners from the once-militant Fatah movement.

So much for brotherly love. Since then, the militants have aimed a steady rocket barrage at Israel, press reports show, while quelling crime and unrest with killing and torture. Terrorists bomb the only border crossing into Israel even as people demonstrate to have it open, and the Israeli army comes across the border to hunt militants, warning the natives to stay inside.

Sometimes, the troops and the villagers know each other by name, the Israelis say.

The U.S. looks askance at the Hamas regime, which we officially brand as a terrorist movement.

The militants say they'd like to return to power sharing with Fatah, but that could cost the West Bank government western support.

And the Bush administration sees violence in Gaza as interfering with its last-minute peace initiative.

No one is very happy, least of all the people of Gaza, who live under a Taliban-style regime and suffer from constant Israeli bombardment and incursion.

The blockade means there's little trade and no way to make money. Gasoline is scarce (people use vegetable oil to fuel their cars, when they can get it) and for lack of maintenance, failed sewage treatment plants spill tons of pollution into the Mediterranean.

Gaza is but a symbol for the failure of peace in the Mideast, where the history of war and death goes back beyond Genesis. Every recent U.S. president has attempted to broker peace at least twice, at the start of his administration, when hopes are high, and at the end, when legacy seems important.

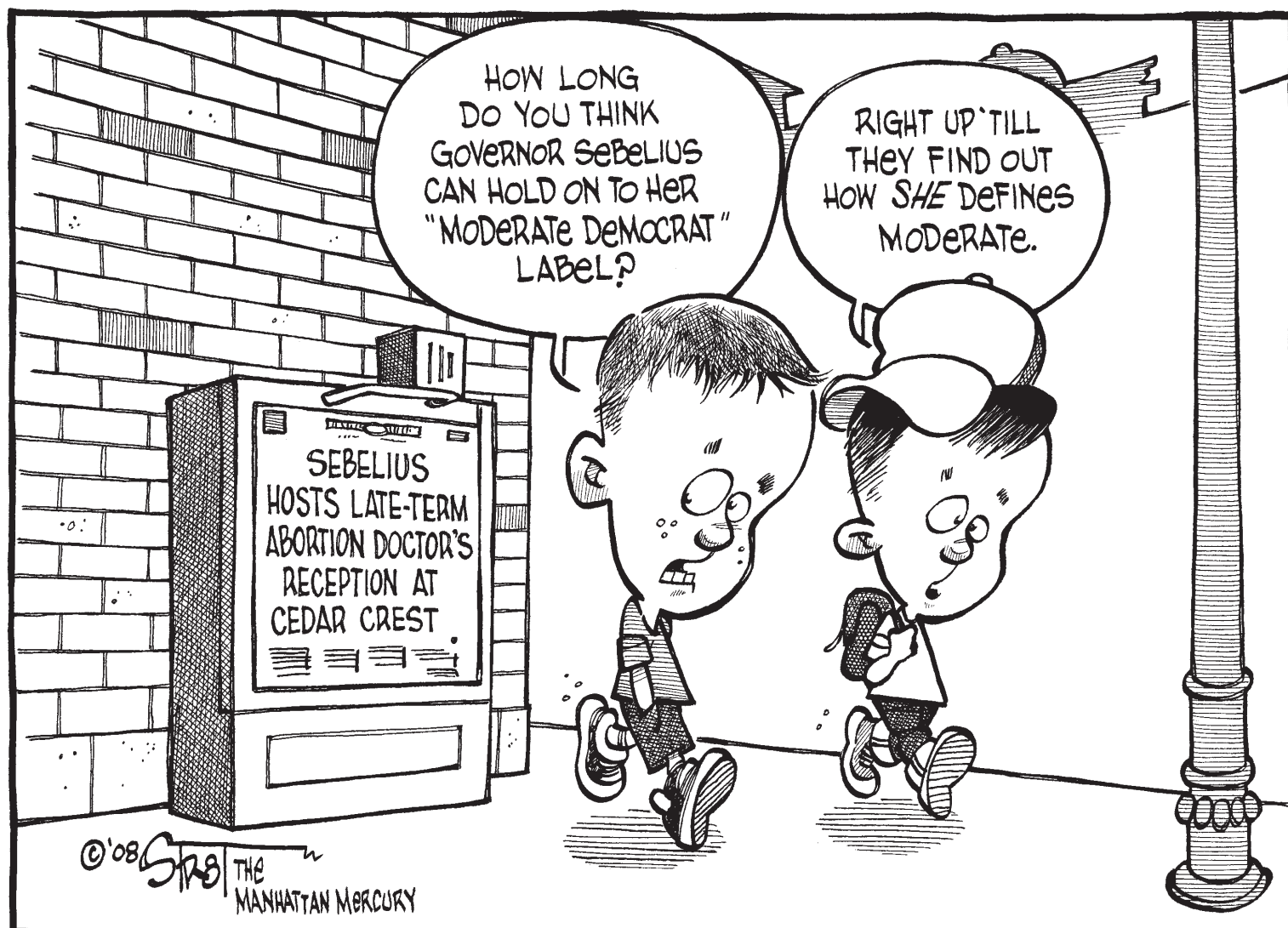
Mr. Bush has done no better, but no worse, than anyone else, but progress had been made over the years. Fighting seems to be down on the borders other than Gaza.

It's mostly the people who live there, natives and displaced Palestinians, who suffer the results of decisions made by the militants and the world's governments. The price they pay seems terrible, akin to that paid by innocent Iraqis.

We wish the administration had a handle on this situation, but it's not likely anything will change, this year or next year, when a new president and a new secretary of state will try their hand at the Mideast.

Perhaps it's not reasonable to expect this to end after only 10,000 years, but there's always hope.

The innocents who suffer, in the Mideast and around the world, deserve better, so we must try. — Steve Haynes



Savannah historic, romantic Old South

SAVANNAH, Ga. — The Spanish moss, like thick bunches of gray hair, drips down out of the live oaks, which stretch their twisted and slightly spooky limbs from one side of the squares to the other.

We're in one of the most historical, romantic cities of the Old South for work and pleasure.

Daughter Felicia is at *The Savannah Tribune* working. We sent her off this morning after breakfast, telling her she was consulting, insulting and assaulting the staff at the paper. She laughed and drove off, leaving us on foot in one of the great walking cities, by day at least. (At night, they say, you could get mugged, but by day, tourists are perfectly safe.)

Old Savannah is built around squares, starting near the waterfront and heading slightly uphill to the south. There are 24 of them now, spread over a square mile. There used to be more, but development and neglect gobbled a few. The city hopes to create some new ones, though, so the number could go up.

Each square is a block of park surrounded by buildings — historic homes, offices, shops, restaurants and churches.

The parks are islands of shade, flowers and tranquility amidst the brick, asphalt and cement of the streets and buildings. In them, people meander, read historical markers or just sit in the shade.



cynthia haynes

• open season

We're in Wright Square now. Steve has his laptop open and he is editing copy while I wander around and watch the squirrels frolic on the ground and jump from tree to tree.

In the middle of the square stands a huge stone marker erected in 1882 and dedicated to William Washington Gordon, founder and first president of Georgia's earliest railroad — the Central Railroad and Banking Co. A eulogy to Gordon is on one side of the marker while the opposite side is dedicated to Tomochichi, the Yamacraw chief, who helped William Oglethorpe found the colony of Georgia back in 1733.

People watching is great in this shaded corner.

Girls from the Savannah College of Art and Design, affectionately known as SCAD, walk by in low-cut tops, leggings and short skirts. Big men walk by with little dogs and tiny women jog by with Great Danes. So much for people and their dogs looking alike.

The bench next to ours has a gaggle of

school kids. They're from northern Georgia and they're on a four-day school trip. Right now, they're more interested in showing off for each other than historic homes, statues and museums. They're nice and polite and offer shy smiles to the nose lady on the next bench.

Next we head for a coffee shop with wireless Internet access. Son-in-law Nik is already there, working on whatever it is he does on his computer. Like an engineer, Nik works really hard, but what he does is a mystery. It keeps his bosses happy and pays well, so I'm not going to try to figure it out.

The coffee shop asks you to buy something if you're occupying their space. That seems fair, and since it's lunch time, sandwiches and coffee fill the bill.

Our laptops join dozens of others on tables around the room as we write and edit. Parts of this job, you can do from anywhere in the world today.

Before you know it, oldest daughter has arrived, noting that it's 4:30 p.m. and do we want to do anything else or just go home?

Home — back to Augusta — is good. Savannah has been a delightful oasis of calm and we even got some work done, but it's time to pack up. Soon it'll be time to head home to Kansas.

The Goodland Star-News

(USPS No. 222-460. ISSN 0893-0562)

Member: Kansas Press Association

Inland Press Association Colorado Press Association

National Newspaper Association

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Published every Tuesday and Friday except the days observed for New Year's Day, July 4th and Christmas Day, at 1205 Main Ave., Goodland, Kan. 67735.

Periodicals postage paid at Goodland, Kan. 67735; entered at the Goodland, Kan., Post Office under the Act of Congress of March 8, 1878.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to The Goodland Star-News, 1205 Main Ave., Goodland, Kan. 67735.

TELEPHONE: (785) 899-2338. Editorial e-mail: star-news@nwkansas.com. Advertising questions can be sent to: goodlandads@nwkansas.com

The Goodland Star-News assumes no liability for mistakes or omissions in advertising or failure to publish beyond the actual cost of the ad.

SUBSCRIPTIONS: In Sherman County and adjacent counties: three months, \$29; six months, \$46; 12 months, \$81. Out of area, weekly mailing of two issues: three months, \$39; six months, \$54; 12 months, \$89 (All tax included). Mailed individually each day: (call for a price).

Incorporating:

The Goodland Daily News
1932-2003

The Sherman County Herald

Founded by Thomas McCants
1935-1989

THE SHERMAN COUNTY STAR

Founded by Eric and Roxie Yonkey
1994-2001

Nor'West Newspapers

Haynes Publishing Company

The other Obama

Here we go again. After being subjected to eight years of the collegial presidency of Bill and Hillary, when we were told that when we got Bill we got Hillary as a bonus, it looks as if we are facing another twofor: Barack and Michelle.

Effete liberal Democrats are all but canonizing Barack Obama, who they see as one of their own — cool, detached, impressively intellectual — all in all what Pat Buchanan described as something fresh out of the faculty lounge, where lofty thoughts abound and contempt for the great unwashed is hardly concealed.

That may be an apt description, implying that the Barack Obama who scorned ordinary folks in small towns who, he sneered, cling to such lower-class crutches as religion and guns, is above the distractions of the madding crowd.

It does not, however, fit the other half of the new twofor, Michelle Obama, who far from being above it all is down there in the trenches acting like the flame-throwing liberal activist she is. To know her is to know what her husband really believes.

As I have told my listeners of my radio show, if you want to understand how Barack Obama uncomplainingly sat through all those fire-breathing sermons without so much as stirring uncomfortably you need to understand the way husbands and wives practice their religion these days.

The men in the pews for the most part are passive, while the wives tend to be passionate. In most cases husbands are there because their wives have dragged them there. Chances are that while the women sit in rapt attention to the words of their pastor, the husbands are snoozing, blissfully unaware of what the reverend is preaching.

From what we've heard from Mrs. Obama she was paying close attention to the Reverend Mr. Wright, eating up his fiery words and probably enthusiastically nodding agreement as he blamed whitey for inventing AIDS to kill blacks as Barack dozed beside her, wondering when the Reverend Wright was going to shut up.

Barack is now wide awake, and for the next seven months he's going to continue to be faced with explaining why he remained silent while his pastor ranted in the pulpit. And insisting that during his presence in the pews the Rev-



michael reagan

• making sense

erend Wright never once acted like Reverend Wright just won't wash. Poor Barack, how can he admit that he didn't hear any of that rabble-rousing rhetoric because he slept through all 20 years of it?

If you want to find the culprit here, turn to Michelle. I'm willing to bet she heard every word of the Reverend Wright's inflammatory sermons, swallowed them whole, and seethed in anger over White America's wretched mistreatment of her fellow black Americans as described by her pastor.

Nowadays she's playing the role of dutiful wife and doting mother, but every once in a while her anger surfaces as it did most famously when she told a group in Milwaukee, "For the first time in my adult life, I am proud of my country because it feels like hope is making a comeback."

Just what is hope in Michelle Obama's

lexicon?

Why it's nobody other than the man she shared a pew with for 20 years, her husband, who she brags "is one of the smartest people you will ever encounter who will deign [i.e. "lower himself"] to enter this messy thing called politics."

"We have lost the understanding that in a democracy, we have a mutual obligation to one another -- that we cannot measure the greatness of our society by the strongest and richest of us, but we have to measure our greatness by the least of these," she says.

"That we have to compromise and sacrifice for one another in order to get things done. That is why I am here, because Barack Obama is the only person in this who understands that. That before we can work on the problems, we have to fix our souls. Our souls are broken in this nation."

Barack Obama, our sole hope — the cobbler who'll mend our poor broken souls. With, of course, the help of his wife Michelle.

Mike Reagan, the elder son of the late President Ronald Reagan, is heard on talk-radio stations nationally. E-mail comments to Reagan@caglecartoons.com.



"HERE'S THE DEAL. YOU GET TO BE THE FIRST BLACK PRESIDENT, AND I GET TO BE THE FIRST WOMAN DICK CHENEY."