

August 7, 2013

Smithsonian Magazine published the 8th grade exam from a county in North Central Kentucky. You'll have to go to the link to see all of the exam.

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James Carafano writes on the president's problem with history. Perhaps, comments Glenn Reynolds, he gets his history lessons from Howard Zinn.

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That assertion registered pretty high on the gaffe meter. Noted [6] the editorial team at Investor's Business Daily, "Few comparisons have been as odious as the one offered by the

president linking one of the great mass murderers of history to one of America's Founding Fathers and authors of our liberty."

It's alarming when presidents engage in the practice of sloppy history—especially sloppy war history. ...

More guffaws about the president's lack of history knowledge from [Larry Schweikart and Burt Folsom](#). Schweikart is from Dayton, and Folsom is from Hillsdale College. *For almost five years now, President Obama has been making the argument that government "investments" in infrastructure are crucial to economic recovery. "Now we used to have the best infrastructure in the world here in America," the president lamented in 2011. "So how can we now sit back and let China build the best railroads? And let Europe build the best highways? And have Singapore build a nicer airport?"*

In his recent economic speeches in Illinois, Missouri, Florida and Tennessee, the president again made a pitch for government spending for transportation and "putting people back to work rebuilding America's infrastructure." Create the infrastructure, in other words, and the jobs will come.

History says it doesn't work like that. Henry Ford and dozens of other auto makers put a car in almost every garage decades before the National Interstate and Defense Highways Act in 1956. The success of the car created a demand for roads. The government didn't build highways, and then Ford decided to create the Model T. Instead, the highways came as a byproduct of the entrepreneurial genius of Ford and others.

Moreover, the makers of autos, tires and headlights began building roads privately long before any state or the federal government got involved. The Lincoln Highway, the first transcontinental highway for cars, pieced together from new and existing roads in 1913, was conceived and partly built by entrepreneurs—Henry Joy of Packard Motor Car Co., Frank Seiberling of Goodyear and Carl Fisher, a maker of headlights and founder of the Indy 500.

Railroads are another example of the infrastructure-follows-entrepreneurship rule. Before the 1860s, almost all railroads were privately financed and built. One exception was in Michigan, where the state tried to build two railroads but lost money doing so, and thus happily sold both to private owners in 1846. ...

For another history lesson, the [NY Post](#) has located Tawana Brawley and has the story of a court in rural Surry County, Virginia that has garnished her wages. We have the added bonus of a period photo of a fat Al Sharpton.

Twenty-five years after accusing an innocent man of rape, Tawana Brawley is finally paying for her lies.

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A Virginia court this year ordered the money garnisheed from six months of Brawley's wages as a nurse there.

She still owes Pagones \$431,000 in damages. And she remains defiantly unapologetic.

"It's a long time coming," said Pagones, 52, who to this day is more interested in extracting a confession from Brawley than cash.

"Every week, she'll think of me," he told The Post. "And every week, she can think about how she has a way out — she can simply tell the truth."

Brawley's advisers in the infamous race-baiting case — the Rev. Al Sharpton, and attorneys C. Vernon Mason and Alton Maddox — have already paid, or are paying, their defamation debt. But Brawley, 41, had eluded punishment. ...

Smithsonian Magazine

No, You're Probably Not Smarter Than a 1912-Era 8th Grader



Exam time

In the early years of the 20th century, the students in Bullitt County, Kentucky, were asked to clear a test that many full-fledged adults would likely be hard-pressed to pass today. [The Bullitt County Genealogical Society has a copy of this exam, reproduced below](#)—a mix of math and science and reading and writing and questions on oddly specific factoids—preserved in their museum in the county courthouse.

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Eighth graders needed to know about patent rights, the relative size of the liver and mountain range geography. They had to be able to put together an argument for studying physiology. Though some of it is useful, much of the test amounts of little more than an assessment of random factoids.

So, if you're anything like us, no, you're probably not much smarter than an 1912 Bullitt County eighth grader. But that's okay.

Tests like this are still done today, of course, [often in the form of "scientific literacy" tests](#). The tests are meant to give an idea of how well people understand the world around them. But, in reality, what these tests share in common with the Bullitt County test is that they quiz facts in place of knowledge or understanding. Designing a standardized test to quiz true understanding is of course very difficult, which is one of the reasons why these sorts of tests persist.

[Writing for The Conversation](#), Will Grant and Merryn McKinnon argue that using these types of tests to say that "people are getting dumber" or "people are getting smarter" is kind of dumb itself. "Surveys of this type are, to put it bluntly, blatant concern trolling," they say.

We pretend that factoids are a useful proxy for scientific literacy, and in turn that scientific literacy is a useful proxy for good citizenship. But there's simply no evidence this is true.

Like asking a 12-year old Kentuckian about international shipping routes, "[t]he questions these [science literacy] tests ask have absolutely no bearing on the kinds of scientific literacy needed today. The kind of understanding needed about alternative energy sources, food security or water management; things that actually relate to global challenges."

So, really, don't feel too bad if you can't finish your grandparent's school exam—the fault lies more in outdated ideas of education than in your own knowledge base.

But, with all that aside, taking the Bullitt County quiz is still kind of fun:

Eighth Grade Examination for Bullitt County Schools, November, 1912

Spelling

Exaggerate, incentive, conscious, pennyweight, chandelier, patient, potential, creature, participate, authentic, bequeath, diminish, genuine, vinegar, incident, monotony, hyphen, antecedent, autumn, hideous, relieve, conceive, control, symptom, rhinoceros, adjective, partial, musician, architect, exhaust, diagram, endeavor, scissors, associate, saucepan, benefit, masculine, synopsis, circulate, eccentric.

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Reading

1. Reading and Writing, (given by the teacher.)

Arithmetic

1. Write in words the following:
.5764; .000003; .123416; 653.0965; 43.37. 10
2. Solve: 35.7 plus 4, 5.8 plus 5.14—59.112. 10
3. Find cost at $12\frac{1}{2}$ cents per sq. yd. of kalsomining the walls of a room 20 ft. long, 16 ft. wide and 9 ft. high, deducting 1 door 8 ft. by 4 ft. 6 in. and 2 windows 5 ft. by 3 ft. 6 in. each. 10
4. A man bought a farm for \$2400 and sold it for \$2700. What per cent did he gain? 10
5. A man sold a watch for \$180, and lost $16\frac{2}{3}\%$. What was the cost of the watch? 10
6. Find the amount of \$50.30 for 3 yrs., 3 mo. and 3 days, at 8 per cent. 10
7. A school enrolled 120 pupils and the number of boys was two thirds of the number of girls. How many of each sex were enrolled? 10
8. How long a rope is required to reach from the top of a building 40 ft. high, to the ground 30 ft. from the base of the building? 10
9. How many steps 2 ft. 4 in. each will a man take in walking 2 1-4 miles? 10
10. At \$1.62 1/2 a cord, what will be the cost of a pile of wood 24 ft. long, 4 ft. wide and 6 ft. 3 in. high? 10

Grammar.

1. How many parts of speech are there? Define each. 20
2. Define proper noun; common noun. Name the properties of a noun. 10
3. What is a Personal Pronoun? Decline I. 10
4. What properties have verbs? 10

The Bullitt County quiz for 8th graders. Photo: [Bullitt County Genealogical Society](#)

The National Interest

Obama's Sloppy History Problem

by James Jay Carafano

Whatever the opposite of a charm offensive is, President Obama is on it.

In Chicago on July 24, Obama delivered an hour-long speech in which he [complained](#) [3] that “with this endless parade of distractions and political posturing and phony scandals, Washington has taken its eye off the ball.” The mother of one of the four Americans murdered at the U.S. diplomatic facility in Benghazi immediately [objected](#) [4]. “He’s wrong. My son is dead. How could that be phony?”

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It’s alarming when presidents engage in the practice of sloppy history—especially sloppy war history.

While Ho quoted the Declaration and Jefferson in his 1945 Declaration of Independence from the French, no reputable scholar of the Vietnam War would ever claim that he aimed to adopt American notions of a democratic civil society. Quite the contrary. His goal was to prevent the French from reestablishing their hold to Indochina once the Japanese were expelled. To that end, he did everything possible to ingratiate himself with the in-country American military advisors—and that included salting his declaration with cherished phrases from the American founding.

The advisors fell for it. Their “failure to identify Ho Chi Minh as Soviet-trained and a Communist ideologue,” [Claude Berube wrote in a study of OSS operations](#) [7], “was a major American intelligence shortcoming that smoothed the way for Ho’s emergence as a national leader and in the end, an enemy of the United States.”

But President Obama possesses more than a half-century of hindsight that those advisors could not. And getting that history right is as important to good governance as getting good intelligence.

The decisions we make that will affect our future are based very much on what we have experienced and what we think we know about the past. No matter how visionary or forward-looking a person may be, many of their judgments are based on history as they understand it. When our recollections of the past are faulty, it leads to even faultier judgments.

Many U.S. policy makers maintain that the Chinese decision-making is inscrutable and visionary. As proof, they often cite a 1972 exchange between Henry Kissinger and Zhou Enlai at the Paris Peace Talks:

Kissinger: Do you think the French Revolution was a success?

Zhou: It's too early to tell.

Wow, that sounds profound. Except we have known for at least several years that Zhou thought Kissinger was talking about the Paris student riots in 1968—not the “let them eat cake,” guillotine-shadowed debacle that started in 1789. Zhou was a being an evasive politician, not a profound philosopher. Yet the story is still frequently told in Washington cocktail circles—and always with the wrong context.

Politicians are drawn to lazy history because it makes life easy for them. If they are wedded to the caricature of Chinese leaders as inscrutable deep-thinkers, a glib historical vignette can make their case...and provide an easy excuse for failure. After all, if the Chinese are inscrutable, no diplomat can be expected to “read” them properly, and no foreign policy can be expected to work as advertised.

The most serious case of such indolent history is the progressive view of the Vietnam War. Obama was barely out of diapers when Lyndon Johnson started ramping up the ground war. Yet, make no mistake, his understanding of the history of that war shapes his approach to today's wars. “As President Obama was considering a deeper American commitment to Afghanistan,” wrote Marvin Kalb in [*The New York Times*](#) [8], “he would occasionally slip into an aide's office, lean on his desk and wonder aloud whether he was making the same mistakes Johnson had made.”

In Obama's history, Johnson's failure was that he got roped into a long-term commitment. The fear of commitment led Obama to prematurely pull the plug on Iraq. It led him to opt for the light touch in Libya. It has made him pant for the zero option in Afghanistan. And it has moved him to exhibit zero interest in Syria.

But in following his self-taught history lesson of avoiding tragedy by avoiding commitment, he has adopted a tragically wrongheaded foreign policy.

After all the blood and treasure invested in Iraq, the premature U.S. pullout has given Al Qaeda and Iran a second chance to make mischief. The country just had its most violent month since 2007.

The massacre of Americans at the US consulate in Libya made that Obama effort the poster-child for the failure of on-the-cheap-foreign-policy.

In Afghanistan the White House is racing towards zero, while civilian deaths at the hands of the Taliban racing in the opposite direction.

And Syria is looking like an endless war.

Assuming that Johnson's problem was fighting a long war is lazy history. Some long wars must be fought. Johnson's problem was he fought a stupid war.

A less superficial history of the Vietnam conflict suggests that the progressive way of war is anything but the practice "smart" power. Johnson actually started out acting much like Obama, trying to do just enough to avoid being accused of doing nothing. This approach—doing as little as possible to get by—is called the "incrementalist" strategy.

The problem with an incrementalist approach is that the enemy pretty quickly figures out your strategy—and responds by incrementally and repeatedly upping the ante. Johnson got sucked into doing more and more until he was in too deep. Then he lacked the judgment to fight the war in a manner that would lead to a responsible conclusion.

The only difference between Johnson and Obama is that, in trying avoid being another Johnson, Obama is even more cautious and risk averse. In reality, however, he winds up in the same place—failing to defend U.S. interests and leaving the world convinced that America is in retreat.

When it comes to foreign policy, Obama's sloppy history is feeding his penchant for failing often and early.

James Jay Carafano is vice president of defense and foreign policy studies at The Heritage Foundation.

WSJ

Obama's False History of Public Investment

Entrepreneurs built our roads, rails and canals far better than government did.

by Larry Schweikart, Jr. and Burton W. Folsom, Jr.

For almost five years now, President Obama has been making the argument that government "investments" in infrastructure are crucial to economic recovery. "Now we used to have the best infrastructure in the world here in America," the president lamented in 2011. "So how can we now sit back and let China build the best railroads? And let Europe build the best highways? And have Singapore build a nicer airport?"

In his recent economic speeches in Illinois, Missouri, Florida and Tennessee, the president again made a pitch for government spending for transportation and "putting people back to work rebuilding America's infrastructure." Create the infrastructure, in other words, and the jobs will come.

History says it doesn't work like that. Henry Ford and dozens of other auto makers put a car in almost every garage decades before the National Interstate and Defense Highways Act in 1956. The success of the car created a demand for roads. The government didn't build highways, and then Ford decided to create the Model T. Instead, the highways came as a byproduct of the entrepreneurial genius of Ford and others.

Moreover, the makers of autos, tires and headlights began building roads privately long before any state or the federal government got involved. The Lincoln Highway, the first transcontinental highway for cars, pieced together from new and existing roads in 1913, was conceived and partly built by entrepreneurs—Henry Joy of Packard Motor Car Co., Frank Seiberling of Goodyear and Carl Fisher, a maker of headlights and founder of the Indy 500.

Railroads are another example of the infrastructure-follows-entrepreneurship rule. Before the 1860s, almost all railroads were privately financed and built. One exception was in Michigan, where the state tried to build two railroads but lost money doing so, and thus happily sold both to private owners in 1846. When the federal government decided to do infrastructure in the 1860s, and build the transcontinental railroads (or "intercontinental railroad," as Mr. Obama called it in 2011), the laying of track followed the huge and successful private investments in railroads.



Henry Ford in his new T Ford model in 1900.

In fact, when the government built the transcontinentals, they were politically corrupt and often—especially in the case of the Union Pacific and the Northern Pacific—went broke. One cause of the failure: Track was laid ahead of settlements. Mr. Obama wants to do something similar with high-speed rail. The Great Northern Railroad, privately built by Canadian immigrant James J. Hill, was the only transcontinental to be consistently profitable. It was also the only transcontinental to receive no federal aid. In railroads, then, infrastructure not only followed the major capital investment, it was done better privately than by government.

Airplanes became a major industry and started carrying passengers by the early 1920s. Juan Trippe, the head of Pan American World Airways, began flying passengers overseas by the mid-1930s. During that period, nearly all airports were privately funded, beginning with the Huffman Prairie Flying Field, created by the Wright Brothers in Dayton, Ohio, in 1910. St. Louis and Tucson had privately built airports by 1919. Public airports did not appear in large numbers until military airfields were converted after World War II.

No matter where you look, similar stories come up. America's 19th-century canal-building mania is now largely forgotten, but it is the granddaddy of misguided infrastructure-spending tales. Steamboats, first perfected by Robert Fulton in 1807, chugged along on all major rivers before states began using funds to build canals and harbors. Congress tried to get the federal government involved by passing a massive canal and road-building bill in 1817, but President James Madison vetoed it. New York responded by building the Erie Canal—a relatively rare success story. Most state-supported canals lost money, and Pennsylvania in 1857 and Ohio in 1861 finally sold their canal systems to private owners.

In Ohio, when the canals were privatized, one newspaper editor wrote: "Everyone who observes must have learned that private enterprise will execute a work with profit, when a government would sink dollars by the thousand."

In all of these examples, building infrastructure was never the engine of growth, but rather a lagging indicator of growth that had already occurred in the private sector. And when the infrastructure was built, it was often best done privately, at least until the market grew so large as to demand a wider public role, as with the need for an interstate-highway system in the mid 1950s.

There is a lesson here for President Obama: Government "investment" in infrastructure is often wasteful and tends to support decaying or stagnant technologies. Let the entrepreneurs decide what infrastructure the country needs, and most of the time they will build it themselves.

Mr. Schweikart, a history professor at the University of Dayton, is the co-author, with Dave Dougherty, of "A Patriot's History of the Modern World" (Sentinel, 2012). Mr. Folsom, a history professor at Hillsdale College, is the co-author, with his wife, Anita, of "FDR Goes to War" (Threshold, 2011).

NY Post

[Pay-up time for Brawley: '87 rape-hoaxer finally shells out for slander](#)

by Michael Gartland

Twenty-five years after accusing an innocent man of rape, Tawana Brawley is finally paying for her lies.

Last week, 10 checks totaling \$3,764.61 were delivered to ex-prosecutor Steven Pagones — the first payments Brawley has made since a court determined in 1998 that she defamed him with her vicious hoax.

A Virginia court this year ordered the money garnisheed from six months of Brawley's wages as a nurse there.

She still owes Pagones \$431,000 in damages. And she remains defiantly unapologetic.

"It's a long time coming," said Pagones, 52, who to this day is more interested in extracting a confession from Brawley than cash.

"Every week, she'll think of me," he told The Post. "And every week, she can think about how she has a way out — she can simply tell the truth."

Brawley's advisers in the infamous race-baiting case — the Rev. Al Sharpton, and attorneys C. Vernon Mason and Alton Maddox — have already paid, or are paying, their defamation debt. But Brawley, 41, had eluded punishment.



OUTRAGE: *Tawana Brawley attends an Atlanta rally with Al Sharpton in 1988, three months before a jury would rule that her rape tale was a hoax. She had been lying low until The Post last December found her living in Virginia.*



NO ESCAPE: *Tawana Brawley arrives at her nursing job in Richmond, Va., where she had been evading payment of defamation damages*

She's now forced to pay Pagones \$627 each month, possibly for the rest of her life. Under Virginia law, she can appeal the wage garnishment every six months.

"Finally, she's paying something," said Pagones' attorney, Gary Bolnick. "Symbolically, I think it's very important — you can't just do this stuff without consequences."

Pagones filed for the garnishment with the circuit court in Surry County, Va., in January, a few weeks after The Post tracked down Brawley to tiny Hopewell, Va.

Before The Post came knocking, not even her own co-workers knew she was the teen behind the spectacular 1987 case.

"I don't want to talk to anyone about that," Brawley growled after a Post reporter confronted her about her sordid past in December.

Employing aliases including Tawana Thompson and Tawana Gutierrez, she leads a relatively normal life by all appearances, residing in a neat brick apartment complex and working as a licensed practical nurse at The Laurels of Bon Air in Richmond.

She's also raising a daughter, a neighbor said.

Brawley was spotted one morning emerging from her house with a young girl and a man dressed in hospital scrubs.

They left in separate cars — Brawley in a Chrysler Sebring and the man and child in a Ford Taurus. Brawley arrived at work about 30 minutes later, and the man pulled into the same lot minutes afterward.

Her current life is a far cry from the one she fled in upstate Wappingers Falls, NY.

She was only 15 when she claimed she was the victim of a crime whose shocking brutality sparked a national outrage and stoked racial tensions.

The two-decade-long saga that nearly ruined Pagones' life and career began on Nov. 28, 1987, when Brawley was found in a trash bag, with the words "n----r" and "b---h" scrawled on her body in feces.

In her first meetings with police, the teenager responded to questions with blank expressions, nods and by scrawling notes. She said she had been abducted by two white men, who dragged her into the woods where four other white men were waiting.

But Brawley, a cheerleader, didn't offer much detail. She didn't give police names or detailed descriptions of the men she claimed had brutalized her almost nonstop for four days.

What she did share — that one attacker had blond hair, a holster and a badge — sparked a media firestorm in New York City, which was still reeling from the killing of a black youth in Howard Beach, Queens, by a white mob.

Firebrands Maddox and Mason and a relatively unknown Sharpton jumped into the fray. Within weeks, a suspect emerged — Fishkill Police Officer Harry Crist Jr., who had been found dead in his apartment three days after the Brawley "attack."

But Pagones, a Dutchess County prosecutor at the time, defended his dead friend Crist, offering an alibi for the cop — they were Christmas-shopping together on one of the days in question. And on the three other days of the "kidnapping," Crist was on patrol, working at his other job at IBM, and installing insulation in an attic.

Brawley's handlers then claimed — without proof — that Pagones was part of the white mob that kidnapped and raped the girl 33 times.

Celebrities lined up to support Tawana, including Bill Cosby, who posted a \$25,000 reward for information on the case; Don King, who promised \$100,000 for Brawley's education; and Spike Lee, who in his 1989 film, "Do the Right Thing," included a shot of a graffiti message reading, "Tawana told the truth."

A grand jury reached a different conclusion. The jurors, who heard from 180 witnesses over seven months, concluded in 1988 that the entire story was a hoax.

They determined Brawley had run away from home and concocted the story — most likely to avoid punishment from her stepfather, Ralph King, who had spent seven years in prison in the 1970s for killing his first wife.

Crist's suicide was unrelated; he killed himself over a failed romance.

"It is probable that in the history of this state, never has a teenager turned the prosecutorial and judicial systems literally upside-down with such false claims," state Supreme Court Justice S. Barrett Hickman wrote at the time.

For Pagones, the damage was done. His marriage unraveled, and he ended up leaving his job as a prosecutor. He continued to proclaim his innocence, making it his life's mission to bring Brawley and her advisers to justice — and compel them to tell the truth.

In 1998, he won his defamation lawsuit. Maddox was found liable for \$97,000, Mason for \$188,000, and Sharpton for \$66,000 — money that was paid by celebrity lawyer Johnnie Cochran and other benefactors.

Sharpton, now a national figure, has never apologized for his role in the hoax. Mason, an ordained minister who hasn't practiced law since being disbarred in 1995, has remained mostly silent.

But Maddox, whose law license was suspended in 1990, continues the drumbeat for Brawley. He even tried to petition the Surry County court to halt the garnishment of Brawley's wages.

He maintained that in New York, where the defamation case took place, two sets of laws apply.

"The common law applies to whites. The slave code still applies to blacks," he said.

In a July 22 legal brief signed by Brawley and submitted by Maddox, Brawley contends she wouldn't submit herself to the court's jurisdiction because an appearance in the court, "which inferentially sympathizes with the Confederate States of America, would be contrary to the US Constitution and would amount to a 'badge of slavery.' "

Brawley did not return messages seeking comment.

Pagones is still licensed to practice law but is now a principal at a New York-based private-investigation firm. He has remarried, has three daughters and a son, and lives in Dutchess County.

Brawley was ordered in 1998 to fork over \$190,000 at 9 percent annual interest. She now owes a total of about \$431,492 — a sum she could be paying for the rest of her life.

Or maybe not.

Pagones said he'd forgive the debt if Brawley admits the truth.

"I'm willing to consider anything," he said.



