

# Opinion



## Free Press Viewpoint

### Jury room has a way of providing surprises

So, Michael Jackson walked. The jurors just couldn't find a smoking gun. They said they looked hard and long. The state failed in its argument. The defense said all the right words. Maybe it was because of a prosecutor who was hell-bent on finding Michael Jackson guilty. A prosecutor whose apparent full-time mission was to toss Jackson's fanny in jail. Over zealous, would be the term. Too, we television viewers were spoon-fed what those so-called "analysts" wanted to feed us. And if you watched many of them, they, too, couldn't agree on what they witnessed in the courtroom. Which is one of the reasons we were in hopes that the judge would have let the Jackson trial be as public as was the O.J. Simpson trial. But that didn't happen and consequently we didn't know what evidence the jury was privy to as it moved toward deliberations. Another example was the actor Robert Blake murder trial. If you believed what the analysts were telling us, there was little hope that Blake would walk. But he did.

I (the publisher of this newspaper) sat on a jury some years ago. It involved a student and a popular couple in that community. The student hit the couple with his car one night as they were walking along the street. Early speculation was that the student would be justly punished. After all, the couple suffered serious injuries.

But after a few days hearing all the evidence, the jury concluded, during its deliberations, that the student did nothing wrong. He was not guilty of anything. The couple, however, the jury concluded, didn't take steps necessary to protect themselves. They walked in the street, at night, next to a sidewalk. Their clothing did little to warn motorists of their presence on the street.

Going into the case, however, all I had to go on were reports carried in the newspaper. It didn't sound like an open and shut case to me. But coffee drinkers prior to the trial were quick to condemn the student. "Probably speeding." "Maybe beered up a little." You know how coffee shop drinker-juries reason.

Sitting in the jury box and watching and listening to all the testimony is a real eye opener. You know your responsibility and that responsibility takes on a more pronounced tone. You hear BOTH sides of the story. You hear closing arguments from BOTH attorneys. We saw both parties involved. We listened as they took the stand.

Then we retired to the room — the jury room. After frank discussions, we all arrived at the same verdict — not guilty. But had I listened to the coffee jurors, the young man would have been launched by missile into outer space.

So, we are back to the Jackson jury. They saw and heard something we didn't. They looked for the smoking gun. It wasn't there. I thought, in the end, he would be found guilty as charged. But he wasn't. Not in this particular case, anyway.

Tom (TD) Dreiling  
Free Press Publisher

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"DO I HEAR A 25 PERCENT MARKUP? 25 PERCENT!... DO I HEAR 30 PERCENT? 30 PERCENT!... FORTY?! FORTY!..."

## When 'old' friends get together

"Remember when we..."

"No, but I remember when you knocked on my door at 2:30 a.m. one morning to go ride around in your dad's pickup to look at flood water."

This type of conversation took place between my high school best friend and me over the weekend when she came to Hoxie to sing for a wedding. She didn't come to sing for just any wedding. She came to sing for her first cousin's wedding.

But wait, it gets better.

Not in a million years would I have ever guessed my next door neighbor would end up marrying my best friend's first cousin. About a year ago, my neighbor told me who he was dating. Immediately after he told me her last name, I was able to tell him her maiden name, her mom's name and where her mom lived, as well as where his lady friend went to school and that she played basketball while she was in school. That was one jaw dropping experience — on his part anyway.

Who'd a thunk I knew the young woman when she was a couple years ahead of my son in high school at the very same school from which my best friend and I graduated.

Well, the wedding went off without a hitch and it was such fun for my friend and me to reminisce about the 30 plus years ago we spent in school. The giggles were a sure thing as we looked back at our lives.

I'm amazed that we can remember useless information, like the fact on Feb. 1, 1973, the Class of 1973 which had 73 students had 73 days of school left before graduation. We could remember that piece of school day trivia last Thursday evening, but we couldn't remember what we'd had for lunch earlier that day.

And, when my friend asked why the Class of



Jan Katz Ackerman

• From Where I stand

1973 has only had one class reunion in these past 32 years. I was right on cue with the answer.

"We didn't like each other as a class back then, why do you think we'd like each other now?"

She thought I had a good point!

After hours of chatter and giggles, we packed away the "yester-years" and got back to the business of life. I headed for work and she packed up her car and headed to Illinois for the remainder of her 2-week vacation.

All in all, what I garnered from this past weekend is the proof that it really is a small world and we really are getting old.

-jka-

There's something wrong with my television.

A few years ago about the only thing I could tune in was some skycams showing me a chase for O.J. Simpson in a white Bronco on a California freeway. Then for about a year, it seemed like the only thing on TV was scenes of a courtroom where Simpson was acquitted of murder.

For the past couple months, it seems like the only thing on TV has been the trial of Michael Jackson who was charged with 10 counts of child molestation and administering an intoxicating agent to a minor.

Then Monday afternoon, that same TV had skycam coverage of a black sport utility vehicle

driving Michael Jackson away from a California courtroom after he was acquitted.

Maybe I need a new TV or just need a satellite feed which blocks out California skycams. But instead of me buying a new TV, maybe we as a nation need to take music and movie stars off their self-appointed pedestals and at the same time clean up our morals.

Jackson is reportedly some \$20 to \$30 million dollars in debt for his legal defense. Add to that the fact his credibility and image are corroded and you still have a 44-year-old guy who has admitted he likes sleeping with young boys.

Now the man who started his career as a child really needs to get his act together. All I can say is that once again California money has talked and it's talked loudly. I don't care how much money Jackson has, his fantasy of being a resident of Never-Never Land and allegations of fondling a child leaves him a far cry from being Peter Pan.

What in the world is Jackson thinking? You'd think any man who had gone through not one, but two sets of allegations about child molestation wouldn't be caught dead near a child. And, if he's smart, Jackson will voluntarily set in place supervised visitation with his own children.

Our little white gloved Mr. Michael Jackson better sell everything he owns and buy stock in Clorox because the guy needs to make every one of his moon walks sterile from here on out.

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## Leave Star Wars in the movie house

Admiral John Shanahan (Ret.)

• Guest Commentary

It's ironic that just as the latest episode of Star Wars sweeps the country, news is leaked from the White House that the Pentagon is pursuing a program to put weapons in space.

Why?

Because it's the Star Wars concept, first proposed by President Ronald Reagan, which has led to the Pentagon's decision to pursue space weapons.

Now wait a minute, you're thinking. Star Wars is long gone. Well, not exactly.

It's true that President Reagan's original idea to base "defensive" weapons on satellites in the cosmos has been off the official books ever since President Bill Clinton decided to scale it back.

Clinton proposed a limited "Star Wars" plan. It was referred to as "National Missile Defense," and the interceptor missiles were designed to be placed on land, not in space.

Democrats supported Clinton's plan for political — not military — reasons: Democrats hoped to take another issue away from the Republicans. We support missile defense, too, they wanted to tell voters — just like the Republicans.

This strategy failed, because Republicans then proposed a bigger missile defense system, leaving Democrats where they started: on the defensive.

After 9/11 — which was irrefutable evidence of the limited benefit of Star Wars — Democrats threw in the towel completely and voiced little or no opposition to the missile defense program.

And so the program has gone ever since. Silos are now under construction in Alaska, even though the ability of the system to shoot down

incoming missiles has never been proven.

This, despite federal expenditures on missile defense of about \$10 billion per year — enough to provide health insurance for every uninsured kid in America. Over \$80 billion has been spent on missile defense over the years, about the same amount as America has spent on finding a cure to cancer.

Even with these expenditures, missile defense tests continue to fail as often as succeed — not a great track record when you consider that it takes only one nuclear missile to slip through the system to cause unspeakable death and destruction.

Now we've arrived at a point where reasonable politicians, Pentagon officials, and scientists should conclude that missile defense, as currently conceived, will not work.

And that's just what the Bush administration has apparently concluded. But rather than give up on the program, Pentagon officials are planning to return to the grand Star Wars plan, as envisioned by President Bush, with weapons on satellites circling around the planet waiting to shoot down enemy missiles as they're launched.

They see this as the only plan that has a prayer of working — no matter what the ultimate cost.

And how would our enemies respond to a new Star Wars program? They'd start building nuclear bombs to counter it? The easiest way to combat a Star Wars "defensive" system, which our enemies would surely see as a threat, is to overwhelm it with nuclear missiles, ensuring that some get through. And if some bombs get through, our enemies would reason, then an offensive attack by the United States is unlikely.

We can find a better way to protect our national security than loading space with weapons.

But nothing will change if our political leaders are too scared about being labeled "weak on defense" to challenge even the most egregiously wasteful Pentagon projects.

We need leaders who have the guts to stand up and say that throwing money at the Defense Department will not make us more secure.

We need smart defense spending. And cutting "missile defense" funds and transferring the savings to our kids is a great way to show just how smart our country can be.

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Vice Admiral Jack Shanahan (USN, Ret.) formally commanded the U.S. Second Fleet and heads the Military Advisory Committee of Business Leaders for Sensible Priorities, the parent organization of TrueMajority.org. Business Leaders for Sensible Priorities is working to increase funding for needed domestic programs by cutting wasteful spending at the Pentagon. This column is distributed by MinutemanMedia.org.

### Doonesbury

• Gary Trudeau

