

INSIGHT

Cartoons/D3
Doonesbury/D4

Letters/D3
Our View/D2

Sunday, June 18, 2023

Maine Sunday Telegram

SECTION D



JIM FOSSEY

Legislative process on abortion rights was total sham

For years, there was a general bipartisan consensus on abortion rights in Maine. The state law governing access to the procedure was just fine. While a small but vocal segment of the activist base in both parties pressed for either greater access or further restrictions, most elected officials, Democrats and Republicans alike, were happy to leave well enough alone.

When she was running for re-election, Gov. Janet Mills seemed content to follow this bipartisan consensus, claiming that she supported leaving Maine's as they were. This seemed to be an attempt to avoid the debate entirely, shifting attention instead to the views of her opponent, former Gov. Paul LePage, who endorsed some further restrictions — though he stopped well short of supporting the measures being introduced in Republican-controlled states. This proved to be a winning strategy though it's debatable how much of an impact it actually had on the outcome; polls had consistently shown Mills ahead of her predecessor.

Shortly after being sworn in for a second term, though, Mills changed her position, endorsing a number of measures intended to expand access to abortion. While Mills claims to have had a legitimate change of heart, it's hard to believe that an experienced elected official and lawyer could truly have her mind changed after the election on a dime. Instead, it's easier to believe that she was, in fact, always open to expanding access to abortion in Maine, and that her stance during the campaign was simply one of political convenience.

After all, this is one of the major issues driving the base in both parties these days, while this position might have cost her a few votes during the election, now that she's begun her second term, Mills has nothing to lose politically from her shift. Still, it would have been far preferable for her to be honest during the debate, just saying that she currently had no plans to change Maine's abortion laws. That would have probably been just as safe for her politically — and it might even have had the advantage of being the truth.

Once Mills was officially on board with expanding access to abortion in Maine, the rest was just a matter of crossing the T's and dotting the I's. Yes, she had to introduce legislation or find specific bills already introduced that she would support, but once that was done her passage was all but assured. Unfortunately, abortion — like many other areas of public policy these days — has become one drawn on a starkly partisan battlefield, where nuance is lost and neither side is even willing to entertain the idea of compromise.

Indeed, the entire legislative process became a fait accompli once Mills made her position clear. While committees had to do their work to fine-tune the

Photo by FOSSEY, Page D4

SUBVERTING THE MYTH OF MAINE BY KAYAK IN CASCO BAY

A four-day expedition, sleeping on islands before returning to school in Brunswick, underscores how much more there is to the state than meets the eye.

I forgot spoons, a bowl, cooking oil, the second bottle of fuel, dry shoes and a ground cloth. We made carry the first night and ate it with purple mussels, shells, sitting in our socks on the slick, gravelly sand.

We were on Jewell Island, five or so miles from the backshore of Peaks. We'd paddled four sea kayaks across Hussy Sound to Vail, and from there took the straight shot over to Jewell, bypassing the protection of Chebogue and Long. It was so sunny it didn't feel like October. The water looked like it would chafe if you touched a single piece.



Port Edna St. Vincent Millay wrote of Ragged Island in Harpswell, which features picturesque cliffs.

We passed Hope Island with the big red barn, and I told my friends how there was a rumor that a man who visited the island subsequently by plane, owned peacocks. Maybe, from the shore of Jewell, we'd hear them calling across the night.

The first time I bred my where but Maine was in 2018, and I left for college. I took an English class. When I went to my professor's office hours, he asked my name. "Soley," he said. "Soley..." I can't take any credit for that, sir. I would have said if I were in a book. Clearly the man had never been to Portland.

"That's the name," I really did say, "because I'm from an island in Maine."

"That became the fatal line. Saying I was from Maine gave me an edge, like saying I wanted to be a writer. Both were justifications for choosing unconventional over strict success.

But really it was because, at college in a city 900-air-ways, I'd become an island. All my sentences started with "I."

Before my first semester in Brunswick, I swam from Peaks to East Eden Beach. I ran it all back then in the green summer, the one of our old, VCRs — red doubt, vomiting, the feeling I was stroking as hard as I could and getting nowhere, the sound of propellers in my ears — and then I was there, swimmers striking my shoulders.

That first night on Jewell was windy and cold and we crunched around the fire for a while, keeping warm from talk, but we'd been camping together too many times before to stay up until 7:30. When we left in the morning, we were watched. A group onshore at the mast compile over blood together on the overbite of the crowding shore. These tandem kayakers were sleeping in, slowed nearly dead to sea.

"They don't think we should go out," I explained. If we were in Portland, they might have called the harbor master rather than wave their arms to call us back.

"We're kayakers," I wanted to call out indignantly, and I'm from here, I'm from Casco Bay!"

Photo by MYTH, Page D4



The waters of Casco Bay off Ragged Island. The island "was beautiful but not sunny. You felt the causes of raggedness there, but none of its effects," Peaks islander Luna Soley writes.



VICTORIA HUGO-NIDAL THE MAINE MILLENNIAL

Our state was not without slavery

It occurred to me in June 1863, while the Emancipation Proclamation was signed on January 1, 1863, freeing all enslaved people in America on paper, we all know that paper can't fight a battle and words don't do much without follow-up action.

Hundreds of thousands of Americans remained enslaved for the next two and a half years through the Civil War, until June 19, 1865, when the Union Army arrived in Galveston, Texas, to inform Texans that all slaves were free. Juneteenth, which started as a community celebration, has grown over the years — because Americans will take pretty much any excuse to party — and it became an official federal holiday in 2021.

When it comes to slavery, most white Mainers like to think we were one of the "good" states. After all, Maine was in the north. I fought for the Union. Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain, Harriet Beecher Stowe and Frederick Douglass were a national institution. It may have been centered around the South, but, like the 19th-century hurricane's eye radiates outward, so too did the effects of slavery. After all, Maine became an official state as part of the Missouri Compromise, keeping the balance of slave states and free states intact. So from the moment Maine was officially Maine, it was morally compromised on that front.

Massachusetts was the first American state to abolish slavery which it did in 1783, which meant that, as part of Massachusetts (I know, I hate remembering that too) it was illegal in Maine. Prior to 1783, however, there were hundreds of enslaved people living and laboring in Maine. Maine never had the version of human bondage involving neat agricultural plantations, but people were in slavery here too.

After 1783, our economy of shipbuilding and seafaring certainly kept us plugged into all the economic activity of antebellum America, and slavery was its biggest engine.

The beautiful ship captain mentions that line the harbors and rivers of Maine, which do you think those captains were paid so handsomely to transport? The crops that filled those Maine-made ships who filled these fields? The cotton spun into cloth in our mills, where did it come from?

If you've been around southern Maine, you'll see the name Peppercorn everywhere: Peppercorn Cove in Kennebunk, Peppercorn Mill in Hallowell, Sir William Peppercorn bought and sold slaves throughout his life, and he made his fortune importing rum from Antigua from was made from sugarcane, sugarcane was grown by enslaved people on vast Caribbean plantations.

Or take Nathaniel Gordon, the only person in the history of the United States

Photo by MAINE, Page D4

D4 Maine Sunday Telegram / Sunday, June 18, 2023

INSIGHT

MYTH

Continued from Page D1

But we only looked over our shoulders at them, into the wind. What did they see? Four kids who should have stayed in. They thought we trespassed on the wind.

We dredged four arrows in a white shell beach with our bows. A geologist mused said the island was owned by Bates College. There was a stone-and-mortar house with broken windows and peeling paint.

It looked like a good place for a shepherd to sleep. From an empty tent platform covered in tree tips and brittle grass, I could see Eagle Island.

My dad took me there once, the site of Arctic explorer Admiral Peary's summer home. I remember bones and refuse.

"Let me see there," someone shouted, and I stepped. An island, centered towards Harpswell Sound then, stopping at a seaside lobster pound, still in our spray skirts, to beg for butter.

"Sera," the heaviest said brightly, "how many pounds would you like?" A cold drink started — my dad would have said someone up there was spilling on us. Under the bridge between Owa's and Bailey islands, we argued a bit about which way to go. Maybe we'd stop at the Coastal Studies Center where I'd come every day last year to sail and leave there was a ramp and float.

There'd be fresh water here, and somewhere sheltered from the wind to cook and sleep. But we turned the other way, instead, back out into the sound.

The waves were steep or here, with whitecaps sliding down the slope. The spaces between our boats widened.

The whole kayak with red piping was far ahead now; my friend was there and gone again, a mirage. He rode the waves down into the trough.

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We landed. Relief. Long slippery plains of seaweed leading up to the beach. The rocks were modest, hiding their curves beneath yards of green. We set the boats down above a berm of sand and driftwood and set off to explore.

Ragged Island, as we later learned it was called, was beautiful but not lovely. You felt the causes of raggedness there, but none of it struck.

The rocks on the open shore were Arctic white and the trees horizontal and receding from the wind but on the other side — where we squatted on wet clumps of seaweed the next morning to our punches — it made with the beggared butter — they were layered like filo dough. There was a house on the air side, its windows dark but the silver cedar clean and recently maintained. On the other, a cliff — short, yet severe — where we stood together and watched the colors pass, gray to purple to antique gold.

Edna St. Vincent Milley wrote a poem about Ragged Island. She might not say she owned it, but she bought it with her husband in 1924. Her modern author visit engaged, with her warden Greenwich Village ways.

Everybody knows she grew up in Camden. I'm from an island in Maine, but I didn't make me who I am. The fact that our neighbors came to my mom's backyard through the kitchen to make themselves a PB&J might have, and that we did the same to them. We all have the summer-lazy airline we were hungry for it, and we'd sit on their long, shaded porch between mother and aunt and their competing clouds of cigarette smoke and listen to their friendly strain of gossip when we were hungry for that.

There are cadences, some for Maine, that transcend themselves as mantras. I could have submitted this story to one of them, but I worry they'd miss the point. They would not write about my mother, who has been known to "accidentally" put spray summer stickers who stray into her yard with a garden hose. Or my father, who jokingly refers to himself as "terrorist." Their modern author visit engaged, with her warden Greenwich Village ways.

weeds, a smooth end of every summer — however long it takes to establish that difference between home and the way life should be. They come to harness their "I." They think Maine is a photograph of Ragged Island, intertwined with that of my friends. It is also shared with — and altered by — a woman who wrote about it. "One becomes someone there," Milley said, "pride and promotion."

Remember, you only look, you secretly feel. From adolescence, with its vital staves. It is seldom arduous song; and there it is acute. Oh, to be there, under the silent spruces.

Where the white, quiet evening darkens without haste. Over a sea with death acquainted, yet forever elusive.

In the morning, we padded into the sound until its throat constricted and perched. We dragged the boats up then, left them in the woods with mud on paddle grips, feet, and heels and still the red shells back to camp. I followed the actual from Gardner, worked for Sen. Susan Collins. We can be contacted at perkins@maineinsight.com. Twitter: @jmaineinsight

what we saw with the attention bills: staged debate that stifles real discussion. That's not the real democratic process that the people of Maine deserve.

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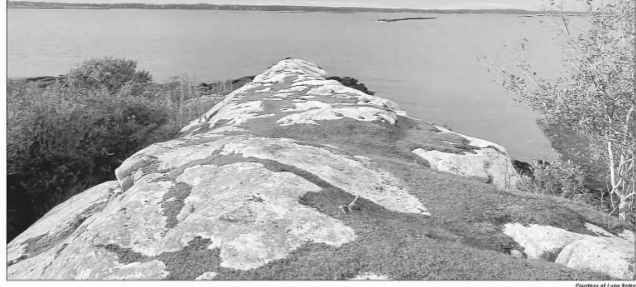
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Ragged Island in Harpswell. Mainer Luna Soley writes of the short cliffs "where we stood together and watched the colors pass, gray to purple to antique gold."

FOSSEL

Continued from Page D1

language of each bill, the outcome has never been in doubt. The hours upon hours of public testimony the drafting demonstrates all over the state and the many letters to the editor for next to this and other

papers were nothing more than political theater. That's a shame, because this bill process not only wastes the time and energy of the general public, activists and elected officials alike, it widens the gap in our democracy. Rather than both sides reaching to their trenches and using the issue for purely political purposes, we would all

have been better served if they had done some actual governing instead. Neither party was interested in real governing when it came to this issue, though. Instead, they wanted a spectacle to expose the masses.

That was made utterly clear when Milley and other supporters of the legislation decided to hold a big press conference in Augusta to unveil their proposals. It wasn't always the case, but these days when that happens in Augusta, that's not really the beginning of the legislative process but the end. Proposals already know they're do or die. Milley's modern author visit engaged, with her warden Greenwich Village ways.

is a hinge in the door of history, the end of one long and bloody struggle and the beginning of another. There's one thing that I can tell you for sure, it's that you can't move forward into the future without looking your past in the

eye. If you're celebrating Juneteenth tomorrow, have a wonderful day. If you have no celebrations planned, I hope you'll take a little time to think about Maine's role in perpetuating America's original sin of slavery, and what role Maine can play in the ongoing reckoning with that history.

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MAINE

Continued from Page D1

to be executed for illegal slave trading. He was from Portland, as was his father and later on, his descendants. On his final voyage, his ship was intercepted by federal authorities with 40 kidnapped Africans on board, half of whom were children. Had that particular trip been nothing out of the ordinary for Captain Gordon or for thousands of similar voyages over the 350 years slavery was at least partially legal on American soil. Can you even imagine the scale of that suffering?

Or take the Victoria Mansion, which I definitely thought was named after me when I was a little girl in addition to being a stunning work of architecture and a carefully preserved museum that shows examples of Victorian-era life and luxury to tens of thousands of visitors each year.

It was never much a product of slavery. Its first owner was named Ruggles Moore, who commissioned its building and funded the sumptuous furnishings with the profits he earned from buying and selling human beings.

Originally from Maine, he moved south, owned and operated expensive hotels, serviced in part by people held in permanent bondage, and supplemented that business with a side hustle in buying and selling enslaved people. He took that blood money back north and poured it into the economy here. And so a mansion, no longer a private residence, the mansion generates economic activity in Portland, so in a way, the profits of slavery are still paying it forward for us.

The first African slaves to be shipped to the American colonies arrived in Virginia in 1619. The first

Juneteenth was 246 years later, in 1865. That day in Galveston was 138 years ago tomorrow. If you're following along with the march, you'll notice that slavery was legal in America for much longer than it has been abolished. Juneteenth

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DOONESBURY



BY GARRY TRUDEAU