

DAILY BRIEFING

A QUICK GUIDE TO TODAY'S SUN-TIMES

WEEKEND



Finding good help

Kids should take to the eccentric "Nanny McPhee."
ROGER EBERT'S REVIEW IN WEEKEND

COLUMNISTS

ROBERT FEDER

TRIAL DREDGES UP ANCHOR'S PAST 'MISTAKE'

Despite her hopes to keep it in the past, Marion Brooks' four-year affair with a former mayor of Atlanta is about to be dredged up in federal court. **Page 57**



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DEBRA PICKETT



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Silent treatment of world's outrages only goes so far

It was a stupid thing — the kind of thing that happens all the time — that set me off. It was just some words, spray-painted on a building. A racist scream, captured in black spray paint.

I don't know why it got to me the way it did.

There is a certain point, after all, when it becomes just tremendously uncool to get upset about these things.

You probably remember the girl in high school who, on any given day, was seriously worked up about Apartheid, the whales, nuclear proliferation and/or toxic waste.

No one liked that girl.

No call for rudeness

Preachiness doesn't work. And, anyway, it's a bore. There's a basic social expectation that even if you do happen to have an inner-hippie-chick (or, for guys, an inner Bono), you will keep your moral indignation in check and save the rants about social justice for the Internet echo-chamber.

Because there is something about caring too much that is just, well, pathetic. A constant state of outrage does not suit the well-adjusted adult. And it can get really awkward at dinner parties.

I know all of this well enough to be embarrassed by my own occasional violations of this etiquette. The socially correct approach to discussing AIDS in Africa is to make a wry and cynical comment about the pharmaceutical companies, maybe toss in a reference to "The Constant Gardener." It's important, if you want to be sophisticated and worldly, to act as if you are unsurprised by the incredible cruelty of our inadequate response to the pandemic. There's no analysis, no subtlety, in pounding the table and crying about it.

The same holds true for any other social ill. You can make knowing, sarcastic remarks about the world's indifference, but you can't let on that you're taking it all too seriously.

(And how seriously are you taking anything, really, if you're still heading to work each day and living your same chai tea latte-flavored life?)

The bottom line is that it is not polite to point.

Three words

Why, then, do I find myself angry and heartbroken once again?

I should know better. I should have a thicker skin, a better understanding of The Way Things Are.

Instead, I am utterly unfit for small talk, sputtering inadequately with frustration and disappointment, after running, headlong, into the ugly face of racism.

I showed up, Monday evening, for a visit with the Sambola family, who arrived in Chicago this summer from a refugee camp in Sierra Leone. Daniel Sambola, and especially his young daughters, Mariama and Jariatu, have become my friends in these months and I've been watching them make their way into a new life here.

My breath caught in my throat when I saw the police cars and

news trucks outside their Albany Park home. And I let it out in some sort of weird, choking gasp of a sob when I caught sight of the reason they were there: the graffiti painted on the interior wall of their u-shaped building.

"Niggers not wanted," it said.

Nothing to say

I searched for something to say as I climbed the stairs to their apartment. What explanation could I offer? What apology?

What do you say to a man who has left behind everything familiar to come to a foreign country and work at a menial job just so his beautiful girls will have a chance for a better life?

And what do you say to that man when, seeking only safety from chaos and civil war, he comes to this frigid place, full of strangers, and is welcomed with the ugly scrawl of someone else's hatred?

He was waiting for me at the door.

He knew what the words meant, of course, but asked me just the same, hoping, I think, that he had somehow misunderstood.

"What does this mean — 'niggers?' " he said. "Do they mean us, the blacks?"

"I don't know," I lied.

He continued to pace by the door, as he'd been doing all afternoon since the police had come up to ask if he'd seen anything. He glanced nervously out the window, poised to protect his family should someone follow up the hateful words with physical violence.

He was helpless and empty-handed, but outraged just the same.

The girls, though, were unsurprised. They're in school all day and have quickly come to understand that there are people around who just hate them. The only thing that surprised them was that it bothered their father so much.

That's what we expect of people, isn't it? That they'll just get used to it and overcome and not complain.

By the time I left, the graffiti had already been painted over, but I could still feel it there, hot and loud like the echo of a bomb blast.

It felt wrong to go home to my perfect, comfortable life.

It felt wrong to keep on being polite.

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WEATHER



Today: Variably cloudy, breezy and mild. Highs in the upper 40s, lows in the upper 30s. **Saturday:** Cloudy and mild with rain. Highs in the lower 40s, lows in the upper 30s. **Sunday:** Mostly cloudy with morning showers. Highs in the lower 40s, lows in the upper 20s. **Monday:** Variably cloudy with a chance for flurries. Highs in the lower 30s, lows in the lower 20s.

◆ **Details on Page 48**

LOTTERIES

For tickets dated Thursday, January 26, 2006

Illinois

Midday Pick 3—**580**
Midday Pick 4—**0648**
Evening Pick 3—**120**
Evening Pick 4—**9190**
Little Lotto—**04 08 14 32 39**
Lotto Grand prize: \$3.25 million
Mega Millions
Grand prize: \$50 million

Indiana

Midday Daily 3—**706**
Midday Daily 4—**2562**
Daily 3—**487** Daily 4—**0549**
Midday Lucky 5—**02 16 20 21 36**

Evening Lucky 5—**01 13 22 28 36**
Lotto grand prize: \$1.5 million

Michigan

Midday Daily 3—**585**
Midday Daily 4—**3862**
Evening Daily 3—**980**
Evening Daily 4—**4927**
Fantasy 5—**14 17 22 33 37**
Classic 47 jackpot: \$4.4 million

Wisconsin

Pick 3—**446** Pick 4—**5484**
Badger 5—**06 14 17 21 31**
Super Cash—**01 16 18 22 26 35**
Megabucks jackpot: \$1.1 million
Powerball Jackpot: \$135 million