



Patrimony, Prejudice, and Pigeons

Prejudice and *pigeons* are words I know, but I am being made aware of a new term of late – *patrimony*.

Most definitions of the word *patrimony* indicate the preservation of monuments or of any valued property handed down to us by our fathers or forefathers. This guardianship has within its scope the idea of the careful custody of our nation's treasured memories and monuments. We all know that to forget history is to invite a repetition of her mistakes.

The culture wars of late have generated a new question - what to do with the monuments of the Civil War leaders that adorn courthouse lawns? "To topple or not to topple?" is the burning question. Some advocate, at the very least, a relocation of these memories to museums, archived away from the public eye. Others want them to just go away quietly as unnecessary reminders of a brutal age. Others are simply attacking them by group violence.

Monuments are not just pigeon roosts. They are windows to our history and a warning to coming generations. Memorials are likewise a link to our past; a gift given by our forbearers to all successive generations. These landmarks remind us of events and leaders (both the good and the flawed) that forged our national identity. They

present a balance of wisdom. They say either “Look, and be warned!” or “Look, and be inspired.” It is dangerous to destroy them not solely on the merit of their intrinsic value, but because of the weight of their message.

Confederate General Robert E. Lee gave his life for a cause that would ultimately fail. Can it possible for a nation, freed from slavery by such an epic struggle, to salute this general’s courage while still rejoicing in the ultimate triumph of freedom? Some would say the thought is untenable. In his book, *For Cause and Comrades*, James McPherson notes that though some may argue slavery was not at the heart of the Civil War, “white supremacy and the right of property in slaves was at the core of the ideology for which Confederate soldiers fought.” How then can we abide these now dead war heroes, over 150 years old, standing in our civic squares reminding us of a time when such abuses were not just “tolerated” they were *honored* and *defended*?

Any time racial tensions escalate, these civil war skeletons rattle again. What possible use do they serve? Are they relics of peace or the residue of prejudice? The answer is “yes.” Shall we attack and tear them down to somehow mollify the anger we share over bigotry and injustice today? Though it always *feels* good to hit something when angry, the answer is “no.”

Monuments stand silently in our public view but they speak for a generation now gone. Quietly, their greenish bronze lips whisper to all who have ears to hear, “Look to the past, so that your future may be preserved.” However, these images are slowly disappearing, falling prey to many who desperately seek to erase present tensions by inciting mob violence against monuments. The problem? Monuments don’t feel pain, and racial tensions persist. How many statues will it take to erase the past? When will the cup of vengeance be full? How many dead policemen before we say, “Now things are settled.”

America’s history is indeed a tapestry of colors and thread woven together from many nations and cultures. The pattern is not always pretty or unified. The slave ships were unimaginably cruel unless seen through the tempered glass of time. This oppressive and evil trade brought to our shores has bridged a rich cultural heritage! This is not a justification, but rather an observation that evil parents can bring forth

good children. Is it scandalous to suggest that such an evil thing as slavery could bear anything positive? Consider this.

America indeed plundered Africa and the result of those unspeakable crimes against humanity has exacted a great toll. The wound has left an indelible scar on the face of our nation. Six hundred and twenty thousand American soldiers died in the Civil War. It was only at the end of the Vietnam conflict that the number of American soldiers killed in foreign wars eclipsed the number of American men who died in the Civil War. Yet in the bloody, tear-stained trail of slavery, a rose bloomed. God brought from the ground a costly reward. Our country has been made stronger, richer, and deeper as a result of the immigration of slaves. Today, very few descendants of such an atrocity would trade a life in America (though far from perfect) for any place in the world. What no slave would have chosen then has now become the land of first choosing. How often in my life and yours has providence forced us to places and things we only later found to our advantage?

America is great today not for her lack of diversity, but rather, because of it. She stands for the pursuit of individual freedoms and the belief that every soul is created equal in the sight of God. Red, brown, yellow, black, and white all are precious in His sight. We have struggled as a nation to secure this foundational truth. A president gave his own life because of this historic battle. America's history is not our enemy – it is our greatest advocate and friend.

Tearing down statues is not so much an indictment on the past as it is a commentary on the present. Kicking a dead horse, though made of bronze, doesn't change our history or preserve our freedoms any more than shooting a white officer could ever atone for years of oppression. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. said it well, "Returning violence for violence multiplies violence, adding deeper darkness to a night already devoid of stars. . .Hate cannot drive out hate: only love can do that."

To destroy the symbols that represent the early years of our nation's formation is to attempt to airbrush from history the facts that are part of our national narrative. Slavery was wrong and the war was real. May we never forget to remember the past and learn from it.

I don't intend to defend prejudice. What I suggest, is that we not attempt to rekindle a war that our fathers already won (slavery was abolished on January 31, 1865), but

to win the war of hate on the streets we now live. While some Civil War combatants are seated atop stone horses, most are buried in unmarked graves. Each one paid dearly for our freedoms today. They were true in their generation to a cause of freedom that prevailed. May we be faithful in our generation to preserve the battles they purchased with blood. *The real enemy lives within hearts of stone, and not statues of bronze.*

As Christians, we rally around a cross. This is a painful symbol of the high cost of our soul's freedom. To hide or shrink from its reality is to lessen the impact of the price paid, the price to free all men from a much more insidious danger than all – the slavery of sin. The cross is your invitation to be free indeed. Would you not find true freedom in Him?

Hold high the Cross – it is our Statue of Liberty.

Blessings!

Pastor Regier