

HERMIT HERALD

VOL 1 ISSUE 47

JULY 8, 2020

QUOTE FOR THE DAY:

“This fourth of July is yours, not mine. You may rejoice, I must mourn.” Frederick Douglass, famed orator and former slave on 7/5/1852.

MISMATCHED BOOKENDS:

To the above, Douglass added, “The rich inheritance of Justice, liberty, prosperity and independence bequeathed by your fathers is shared by you, not me.”

Frederick Douglass was born as a slave in 1818, but escaped slavery in 1840, winding up in Rochester, NY. He was an extremely gifted thinker and orator who gave the lie to the popular belief that blacks were incapable of intellectual thoughts and discussions.

Naturally he was an avid abolitionist, but he sought equality for all people, not just blacks.

So, what a disappointment to read that just this past weekend on the anniversary of the above speech, one of several statues to him in Rochester was ripped from its mount and thrown in a gorge- just more of this reactive senseless feeding frenzy about anything that one side or the other doesn't like, resulting in a childish tumbling of statues on a par with the maturity of a grade school food fight, only much higher on the aggression plane.

We leave Rochester to travel back to New Haven and Yale University where, very big news this last week, The Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library has acquired, at substantial expense, the greatest collection of Douglass' works and writings, many incorporated in large, beautifully maintained albums – an everlasting tribute to a brilliant man and, arguably, one of the most influential abolitionists in our country's history.

At the same time, scattered across the campus are six out of fourteen beautiful, crenelated, residential colleges named for slave owners. Plus, the university itself, named for a slaver, Elihu Yale. Mismatched bookends, indeed!!

AFTER THE STATUES FALL:

One of our readers, Bill Polk, who was Headmaster at Groton School for decades, Sends a thought- provoking article authored by Bret Stephens, “After the Statues Fall” ,in which Stephens contends (focusing almost entirely on the Civil War period), that, “Some statues deserve to be toppled. But monuments to those who sought to make the union more perfect should stand. Interesting thought, but then someone has to be judge and jury in each and every instance. By Stephens’ litmus test, anyone who fought for disunion – Lee, Davis, etc has to go, but what about all the Confederate war memorials remembering ancestors, not just in cemeteries or battlefields, but scattered in towns throughout the south? Yes, they fought for disunion, but they are still family to those who are living today. As mentioned in an earlier issue; in the cemeteries at Normandy and elsewhere in Europe, no effort has been made to dismantle or deface the tributes to the vanquished.

Here’s an interesting approach taken by the state of Virginia, which has more than 220

public memorials to the Confederacy. A state law which took place on 7/1/20, “gives local governments the ability to ‘remove, relocate, or contextualize the monuments in their communities’ “. On the surface, seems fair enough, but let’s say a town is 55% white and 45% black, or, for that matter, all white, and the vote is 55 to 45 to keep the statues. Well, I guess that’s democracy at work, but a bunch of people are going to be unhappy.

The Black Lives Matter movement has spawned many others that also seek to reorder or eliminate history; American Indians, Mexican Americans, essentially, minorities of every stripe. It’s almost as if those of us who are not in these aggrieved groups should feel badly about being Americans.

What follows are some quotes regarding the Teddy Roosevelt statue in front of the Museum of Natural History where he has an indian standing on his right and a black man on his left. I find the variety of quotes to be a reflection on almost every one of these controversial statues around the country.

“That statue is an affront to all people of color entering the Museum of Natural History. It’s way past time they opted to remove it.”

And then, “it would be better to leave the statue in place and provide an explanation of the changes in societal expectations. Then someone might learn something.”

Another view. “Before history is rooted up and tossed away, please study it. If all historical figures are to be viewed only through the lens of the evils they did long ago, who would be left?....Correct the present not the past.”

“Our method of fixing racism is to bury our heads in the sand and pretend it never happened. I don’t understand how we can denounce book burnings and textbook alterations that destroy good history and applaud the removal of longstanding statues or memorials to people who at one time were not thought to be bad. Do we destroy the Colosseum now, because the Romans were slavers?”

And finally, “You can’t erase history, nor can it be changed. Such an attempt to do so will only help history repeat itself sooner rather than later.”

Coincidental to writing this, an article appears today on Russia’s longer tenured exercise in exorcizing memories of the past.

Under the title, “Though Statues in Russia fell, the ideas they embodied persist”, Andrew Higgins notes that starting more than thirty years ago, Russia has gone through it’s own feeding frenzy of statue destructions.

So it is today that, while scores of statues to Stalin have been removed over the years, 70% of Russians believe he played a positive role in Russian history. The journalist, Maria Lipman says, “Waging war on bronze men doesn’t make your life any more moral or just.”

“Deleting doesn’t work.” Says Nina Khrushcheva, a Russian expert at the New School. “Removing Stalin from all public places, trying to delete that history, was a big mistake. Once you demolish someone’s hero

you only incite hatred and force feelings underground.” (Think Confederate memorials).

Higgins ends with an interesting quote, considering the source. Retired KGB officer, Aleksei Kondaurov, says, “ Let statues stay in peace. They are witnesses to each epoch and its history. Talk about them and argue about them, but why tear them down.”

ENOUGH- JUST STOP IT!!:

So, I’m going to take a few minutes to enjoy the sports pages, having waded through page after page of pandemic news, statue topplings, civic unrest and the all time record holiday weekend shootings of blacks by blacks in Chicago and New York.

Here’s a photo of a women’s soccer team. It’s National Anthem time and one player is standing while all the rest have taken the knee. Take a slow read of the headline that accompanies the photo. “ATHLETES WHO STAND FOR THE NATIONAL ANTHEM MAY HAVE TO EXPLAIN THEMSELVES.” Sorry folks,

it makes me mad as hell that anyone would dare print something like that. As if to say, you're racist, or not with the program, because you had the temerity to stand for the National Anthem.

**I'll tell you how we can do this. Before the Anthem, all those who wish, can take the knee for a full minute of reflection and then stand for the National Anthem. What a shame it is that NFL owners have fallen victim to, "weaponized political correctness" and surrendered, not to a movement with a bad idea, but a movement that is inappropriate in its time and place. To attempt to conflate standing for the National Anthem with being racist, or non supportive of the cause is beyond contemptible. In fact, regardless the motive, what right does any individual or group have to undo traditions that are part of our country's history? By all means protest, but doing it in this form only causes resentment and hardens hearts against the very objective sought by the protestors – a greater willingness to understand and support those who have legitimate grievances.
Your faithful scribe, PB**

