

Protesting the Statues

Protesting statues based upon the life and works of those honored has become all the rage today.

Ron Chernow wrote the great treatise on Alexander Hamilton which was made into a Broadway show. Chernow fell in love with this subject and pointed out not only Hamilton's interesting and unique relationship with women, but also his devout anti-slavery sentiments. Although the Broadway show did not mention it, Hamilton was educated in Nevis by Jewish women whose families were refugees from the Spanish Inquisition. As a result of that, Hamilton also had a warm spot in his heart for the Jewish community. There are those who believe that Hamilton's ghost wrote the famous letter by George Washington to the Jewish community when Washington became the first President of the United States. Those ringing words from Washington promised the Jewish community, and all those who acquit themselves as proper citizens, protection from bigotry. Washington, of course, freed his slaves in his Will, but not those who he inherited from his wife. That is another story for another day.

Chernow extolls Grant and goes to great lengths to apologize for Grant's shortcomings. The debate was always whether Grant was a lush. Chernow spends a remarkable amount of time in his review of Grant's life discussing allegations as to whether Grant abused alcohol, and generally lets Grant off the hook. According to Ron Chernow, Grant was anti-slavery, although his wife's family were slave owners. It was Grant who first freed up the western part of the Union from the Confederacy, leading to the emancipation of slaves. The General supported the southern Negro population fighting in the Union Army; Grant spoke well of their bravery and heroism.

Interestingly, according to Chernow, one of Grant's generals issued his own emancipation proclamation, which Abe Lincoln promptly revoked. Lincoln thought it was too early for the emancipation proclamation, because there was still a chance, in Lincoln's view, of reconciling with the South.

Chernow tackles Grant's Jewish problem. When Grant chased the Confederate Army out of the Kentucky territory, along the Mississippi River, he promptly banned Jews from that area. Lincoln revoked that decree as well, within two weeks of its issuance. Chernow makes a remarkable argument that Grant was not an anti-Semite but rather hated his father. Grant's father apparently did not have any use for Ulysses' military career. According to Chernow, after a great victory by Grant in the southwestern theatre, Grant's father went to visit him with two Jewish friends. Chernow makes the twisted argument that it was Grant's dislike for his father, and by implication his friends, that led Grant to issue the ugly declaration.

Unfortunately, this was not the first time that Jews had been banned from one part or another of the Americas. The Jews had been banned from the Delaware territory in

the 17th Century and from New Amsterdam when anti-Semite Peter Stuyvesant ruled. Both times, the Dutch East India company revoked the bans.

When the Grant statue was taken down, I thought it odd that the African American community would object to it. Grant's only acquaintanceship with slavery, at least according to Ron Chernow, were the in-laws that he did not apparently care for. However, the Jewish community had every reason to demand that the Grant statute be taken down and that Ulysses Grant be exhumed from Grant's Tomb in New York City! What did those in the Jewish community do? Nothing. Those who support Black Lives Matter seem to have some understanding as to why African Americans did not like Grant, even if they were mistaken in their beliefs, but those same members of the Jewish community were certainly unwilling to stand up for themselves.

Asian Americans and at one time, Irish, Italian and you name it, faced all kinds of discrimination. Those who fought slavery in the north, also murdered African Americans in New York City during the anti-draft riots that took place in that great mecca of America's melting pot. Tension between ethnic groups and religions in the American experience have been going on during the entirety of our existence. We know how badly Native Americans were treated. The trail of tears is a stain on our national conscience.

My parents told me when they drove to upstate New York on their honeymoon, the signs prohibiting them from staying in certain hotels were directed to both Blacks, Jews and dogs. Bigots, and the pun is intended, do not discriminate.

What is to be learned from all of this? There is no question that discrimination must be opposed at every level. By the same token, no one's lives, work or feelings are more important than anyone else's. To the extent that the rage in the African American community alerts us all to bigotry in general, that is a good talisman that we should be listening to. To the extent that the rage of any community is an egoistic ploy to advance one's own internal political agenda, not much good will come of it.

Hopefully, as the great Rodney King asked, "Can't we all just get along?"

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