

CHARLOTTESVILLE AND CONFEDERATE MEMORIALS

By Roy E. Barnes

In light of Charlottesville and its aftermath, it is time to take a deep breath and consider where we are in regard to the vestiges of a war fought over 150 years ago.

Judging others by their race and the use of race in politics is a cancer, and it will infect and kill the body politic unless we control its deadly spread. What happened in Charlottesville was appalling and evidence of pure racial hate. Torch-carrying Neo Nazis and White Supremacists marching through the streets, waving Nazi as well as Confederate flags and giving Hitler salutes is frightening to all of us who love America. Our leaders must condemn quickly and forcefully any such action, and many did. Failure to stand up and do the right thing is cowardice and any leader who fails to do so does not deserve to lead us. Our national leader failed miserably in his responsibility to rise to the occasion and articulate the premise ingrained in our national ethos that all men are in fact created equal. He did not appeal to the better side of us. His action is a sad commentary of the failure to be a constructive solution to race hatred. In fact his action gave comfort to the enemies of freedom. We have a responsibility to assure that if you lead the nation, you lead us all, not just a few extremists who have ideas long rejected by free peoples everywhere.

CHARLOTTESVILLE AND CONFEDERATE MEMORIALS

By Roy E. Barnes

Reprint Without Permission

Slavery was wrong and will always be wrong. It was not benevolent and slaves were not extended members of the family. Slavery was a cruel, violent and demeaning institution which is our national shame. And those who deny the Civil War was fought as an effort by the South to maintain slavery are spreading a myth which further distorts the true course of history. Though our forefathers may have fought bravely, they fought for the wrong cause. America is the great place it is today because of the blood which was shed to assure the South did not prevail in its effort to preserve its slave holding way of life.

So, should we erase from the landscape every reminder of the Lost Cause? The answer to that question is more nuanced.

Symbols of the Confederacy should never be the symbol of the state. The removal of the Confederate banner from Georgia's flag in 2001 was not only the right thing to do, it saved Georgia from having its official state symbol being the same as that which incited Dylann Roof on his rampage through a church killing nine African-American worshippers. I have often wondered how those who voted against the flag change explain their action to their children and grandchildren. There was no excuse for failing to make our flag the flag of all Georgians and not those of only one skin complexion.

What about the monuments of those who led us into the Civil War or defended white supremacy?

CHARLOTTESVILLE AND CONFEDERATE MEMORIALS

By Roy E. Barnes
Reprint Without Permission

What I have always wondered when I saw those Confederate statues on the courthouse grounds is where is the memorial to those held in bondage? If in fact, the memorials are to a part of our history, shouldn't history be told in full and not in part? The carvings of Lee, Davis and Jackson shouldn't be blown off the side of Stone Mountain, but there should be a telling of the story in truthful terms and not the mythical terms of *Gone With The Wind*. Truth is truth and only the complete history should be told. We should examine each of the memorials and street names in this context. For example, Confederate Avenue in Atlanta running in front of the State Patrol in my mind should be changed. It sends the wrong message that the police power of the state is located on a street associated with slavery and suppression.

Further, Confederate memorials should be a teaching point on how good intentioned people can become so blind in their views that blood is shed. The memorials should not all be destroyed or taken down, but the full story should be told. They should be a constant reminder that politicians appealing to passion laced with race can lead to disaster and scar a nation for generations. In the current state of politics no lesson could be needed more.

What is needed most of all is the civil discourse of the issue of race, and a recognition that many of the beliefs held by generations of Southerners were just wrong. We should view the discussion in the same vein as I am taught in the Methodist Church--we are all God's children, and we should look through the eyes of those who are different from us, love them and seek to understand their point of

CHARLOTTESVILLE AND CONFEDERATE MEMORIALS

By Roy E. Barnes
Reprint Without Permission

view. Only then we will begin to heal the wounds of a war which should have been over long ago. ■

CHARLOTTESVILLE AND CONFEDERATE MEMORIALS

By Roy E. Barnes

Reprint Without Permission