

History in Perspective
Posted On:December 31, 1969

We are currently living during a belated focus on history. The Black Lives Matter movement has brought our attention to the systemic racism that has dogged Black communities since the failure of the Reconstruction, after President Lincoln was assassinated.

Formerly considered "historic" statues and memorials firmly planted in countless town squares and courthouses have been revealed to be frauds, not post-Civil War memorials at all. We now know that all of these memorials were payed for and established by the White Supremist KKK from 1900 through 1920.

History tells us is that the North won the Civil War, but the South won the propaganda war. Somehow, the narrative provided by popular arts, books, and movies promoted the idea that the Black slaves were lazy, happy, well treated, and better cared for than when emancipated.

The southern white population feared that freed blacks would get revenge: loot, rape, and murder them in their beds. To prevent this, they empowered local law enforcement, courts, and hooded thugs to intimidate, rape, and murder Blacks with impunity. This ended a brief period in Reconstruction when literate, often distinguished Blacks ran for and won seats in Congress.

It is important to consult history for perspective, to better understand contemporary movements to understand how far we have progressed and how much we yet need to do. Perspective is the key. The other key is not judging the past entirely by current values. We need to understand history's great figures in their own times to get the true picture.

Our current focus on history is giving us some valid judgements, but also shallow misunderstandings. Among the valid judgements are replacing the naming and honoring of Civil War losing generals and leaders. No other country honors the losers of a war by erecting statues and naming university buildings and military forts after them. These men were in rebellion against the legal government of the United States and they lost.

However, it is ridiculous to dethrone our real national heroes and Founding Fathers because they were slave owners. In their day, slavery was a legal system. Many among them, who inherited, not invented, the system, were often uncomfortable with it. George Washington emancipated all his slaves in his will, and even today, many Black people, often distinguished ones, bear the family name of Washington.

Father Junipero Serra, who established the Mission stations in early California, believed that he was doing the right thing in converting the Native Americans. Regarded in this context, we are doing the right thing in California keeping the missions as museums with appropriate information about some of the terrible wrongs imposed on the hapless Natives. He didn't think as we do now, but what he did was an important beginning to the settling our own state. Let his statue and the missions serve as educational illustrations

Agitators have the wrong reason for removing President Andrew Jackson from statues, street names, and his face on our \$20 bills. Removing him because he was a slave owner (when slavery was still legal) is misuse of history. The real reason for dethroning him should be his disobedience to the U.S. Supreme Court, which ordered him to stop his genocide against the Cherokee, and he refused. We were too new a country for Congress to have done what they should have done: impeach and remove him from office. He was a lawless president.

Woodrow Wilson has fallen from the list of good presidents, but for the wrong reason. He was a bigot during a time that most Americans shared his view. What should remove him from honor is that he was a terrible president: dictatorial, lying, ignoring the world's worst pandemic, and promoting fraudulent ideologies. Our current president follows this model.

We might honor some heroes ahead of their time. Plato, 2500 years ago, believed if women were given the same education as men, they would be equally intelligent. In 1688, Francis Daniel Pastorius, and three of his fellow Quakers, drafted the first, formal anti-slavery resolution in America. Two American ladies in 1848 campaigned for voting rights for all women, along with Black men. They deserve honor.

686 words

Dr. Laina Farhat-Holzman is a historian, lecturer, and author of "How Do You Know That? Contact her at Lfarhat102@aol.com or www.globalthink.net.