

## Defending yesterday

There was a time not too long ago when manners mattered, when gentlemen extended courtesies to one another and even gave each other the benefit of the doubt in matters of business and in their personal dealings. We held a door open for a woman before she entered a room and if we were seated when she came in we men rose to acknowledge her presence. When she sat down at a table, we pulled out her chair for her. Then, when she left the table or the room we rose again. Today, we're told that's sexist or demeaning to women. We just thought it to be courteous and respectful towards the mothers of our children and to show our appreciation for them. We used Mister or Missus to address each other until we were given permission to use Christian names. We regarded our elders with respect and said 'yes sir' and 'no ma'am' to them. If we had an opinion on a subject, we offered it politely and wouldn't dream of raising our voices just to gain a little attention or a temporary advantage over a person who spoke more softly than ourselves.

We didn't assume we were always right, but if we were challenged we responded as best we could to the question asked and didn't answer it by changing the subject. We arrived for our meetings, classes or events on time or even a little early because we felt that to be late was the same as stealing someone's time. We also believed in being good role models for others because others were doing the same thing for us.

Authority figures were not disrespected or ignored as if they didn't really matter and we didn't automatically assume our leaders were lying to us or purposely attempting to mislead us. We regarded voting as our civic duty and a privilege, and we didn't use it as a weapon or give it to the person who promised us the most 'stuff.' A candidate's comportment and honesty counted. We considered work to be noble and character-building and something that contributed to rounding out our lives as well as putting food on the table for our families. We honored sacrifice and didn't consider those who made them for others or for their country to be suckers or rubes.

We feared God but loved Him, too. We looked upon all of His creatures and creations with dignity and reverence. We took little for granted and never felt that the world owed us a living, an education or a meal ticket. We didn't petition our government for free college, free childcare or for anything that we hadn't earned or been promised to us by the Constitution. When we gave someone our word it meant something, and if we broke it we knew our reputations would suffer. We respected the law and those who risked their lives to uphold it. We knew there were consequences to our actions and we weighed them carefully before we acted. We expected the legal system to be impartial and to view the facts of a case and never rush to judgment of the accused.

We were aware of the racial tensions and disparities in our country and we never tried to sweep them under the rug of history or justify them. Instead, we marched and protested side-by-side with Black Americans and other minorities and pressured our legislators to do their duty to insure true equality for everyone. If someone called us a *racist* it was one of the worst accusations you could make. When we saw prejudice or bias on display we called it out for what it was, but because we couldn't see into another man's heart, we avoided calling him a racist.

Like the military, we 'saluted the uniform' and respected the offices others held. While we felt within our right to criticize our leaders' decisions, we didn't second-guess their motives. Instead, we listened to them and compared their rhetoric to their actions. We didn't make fun of them for their regional accents or their appearance or their age and certainly didn't stage protests on their front lawns or accost them in the bathrooms of the Capitol Building.

We tried to keep our tempers in check, remembering that everyone had the same rights we enjoyed, one of which was to be treated with civility and respect (no matter how much we disagreed with their opinions). We prized strength but valued strength based on conviction, more. We never confused resilience with stubbornness or dedication with blind faith. While it must be said that we often failed at being the best we could be, every time we did fail, we conducted a personal inventory of our actions and decisions and vowed not to repeat our mistakes.

We were proud to live in a meritocracy where the harder and/or smarter you worked, the more success or breaks came your way. We spent our time on improving ourselves and not envying or coveting our neighbors' goods. We loved our children and made no apologies for protecting them from false prophets or phony ideologies. We encouraged them to play together and join teams and experience all the good that comes from working closely with others. We were involved in their schooling and trusted their teachers and we joined the PTA and attended important counseling sessions and school board meetings. In short, we were invested in our children's futures.

We were patriotic, not because of Hollywood films or peer pressure. We truly loved America and everything good it stood for (and were aware of what needed to be fixed) AND we were willing to lay down our lives if it became necessary to defend it. We made no apologies for standing and saluting the flag, holding our hand over our hearts and singing our national anthem.

Yes, yesterday is gone, and while it's true that we can't bring our yesterdays back, we can remember what made them worthwhile, and if we're smart draw some comparisons with how we're living today. And if we do happen to come up short, we can always change our ways...or we can go on fighting and disrespecting one another. The choice is ours to make and we shouldn't wait for tomorrow. A man cannot kill time without injuring eternity.

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