

WHERE DOES THIS LEAD? - On removing Confederate monuments.

“What a cruel thing is war; to separate and destroy families and friends, and mar the purest joys and happiness God has granted us in this world; to fill our hearts with hatred instead of love for our neighbors, and to devastate the fair face of this beautiful world! I pray that, on this day when only peace and good-will are preached to mankind, better thoughts may fill the hearts of our enemies and turn them to peace. Letter from Robert E. Lee to his wife on Christmas Day, two weeks after the Battle of Fredericksburg (25 December 1862)

War brings out the worst and the best of men. Good men normally don't want to fight. But, there comes a time when they must fight, when evil rises like a fire in the tangles of men's souls.

In our world today, there is a wickedness that seeks to divide men, to shame and to blame. And those who join in it relish inflicting guilt on anyone they can target. The popular culture feasts on bad news, anything terrible, mean and demeaning. The division created between perpetrator and victim is therefore perpetually aggravated, promoting and extending their roles.

The divisions in our culture today are similar in many respects to the divisions of America in 1860. Yes, slavery was a terribly divisive issue, a stain on the American flag since before the founding. But, there were many other contentious issues that divided the nation and need to be recognized and respected by historians and educators and understood by our people at large today for better appreciation of the hardships suffered by both sides – then and now. To assign all the blame for the war to slavery is to do a great disservice to the true history of that time and rob us of a full understanding.

Politically, there was power shifting in Congress from the Southern states to the Northern States as population centers were shifting northward with immigrants arriving from Europe. Economically, the South had a great deal of agricultural wealth coveted by the North as the North began to grow in industrial strength. This brought on trade conflicts over tariffs. The growth of the Federal government began to challenge the rights of States. The rural agrarian culture of the South was challenged by the ascending industrial might of the North. And then, the brutal armies in blue invaded the South.

Animosities rose and tempers grew short. Publications promoted one side over the other. Society fostered mass movements to promote opposing causes. Armies gathered and prepared. And, God in His wisdom allowed the nation to plunge into war. As preachers would say, “We have turned away from God, and He has let His judgement fall.”

War brings out the best and the worst in men. It also humbles men and convinces them of their need to call upon their maker. Abraham Lincoln said in his second inaugural address: “Both read the same Bible and pray to the same God, and each invokes His aid against the other. ... but let us judge not, that we be not judged. The prayers of both could not be answered... The Almighty has His own purposes.” He concluded with this, “With malice toward none, with charity for all, with firmness in the right as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in, to bind up the nation's wounds, to care for him who shall have borne the battle and for his widow and his orphan, to do all which may achieve and cherish a just and lasting peace among ourselves and with all nations.”

The conflict killed over 600,000 Americans, a terrible tragedy for nearly every American family. But, the struggle shaped our country for many years to come. A lot of good actually came out of it. And a lot of good men were recognized on both sides. Those men have been memorialized in monuments and statues all across this country, in towns and National Military Park Battlefields. Their stories need to be told and retold. Great energies have been expended to reconcile the divided country. But, this crusade to remove monuments is only promoting division and animosity.

Robert E. Lee said, “A nation which does not remember what it was yesterday does not know where it is today.” And, “A nation without memories is a nation without liberty.” He also said after the war, “We poor sinners need to come back from our wanderings to seek pardon through the all-sufficient merits of our Redeemer. And we need to pray earnestly for the power of the Holy Spirit to give us a precious revival in our hearts and among the unconverted.”

George Orwell wrote in *1984*: “Every record has been destroyed or falsified, every book rewritten, every picture has been repainted, every statue and street building has been renamed, every date has been altered. And the process is continuing day by day and minute by minute. History has stopped. Nothing exists except an endless present in which the Party is always right.”

Here is a section of the Charge made to the Sons of Confederate Veterans (SCV) by Lt. General Stephen Dill Lee in 1906: “... To your strength will be given the defense of the Confederate soldier's good name, the guardianship of his history, (and) the emulation of his virtues...”

The Tennessee SCV believes in respect for all history and for following the Tennessee Heritage Protection Act of 2016, and therefore opposes the removal of any lawfully erected and protected statues and monuments.