

CONFEDERATE MONUMENTS, AND AUNG SAN SUU KYI

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Introduction

As everyone in the United States knows, and as many people around the world have no doubt also heard, there is a major controversy in America about monuments - statues - to Southern leaders of the Civil War. To most people these monuments are viewed as unpleasant reminders of a past that they would rather forget: A time when racism in the U.S. was so severe, it justified the idea that some individuals were not even human - people - at all. Rather, they were subhuman, and could be owned as possessions. Slavery wasn't just about forcing someone to work for no pay. The deeper idea was that the slaves, the larger group from which they came, were so fundamentally inferior that any behavior at all towards them was acceptable.

A few people, though, and these are largely from the South, the former slave-owning states, say that the monuments are not celebrating this most extremist form of racism. Instead, they honor cultural history - the bravery and fortitude of their ancestors from long ago.

This view is nonsense. The Civil War was triggered when seven southern states from the thirty-four total at the time - this later grew to eleven - announced that they were seceding from the United States. Their reason: They wanted to retain the right to own slaves. Abraham Lincoln, who supported abolition, had just been elected President, and they refused to accept his leadership.

Venerating the South and its war to retain slavery, and in which war 620,000 people died, is idiotic. It would be no different from having a monument in Germany, at the Auschwitz death camp, to the "glorious" Germans who murdered millions of Jews.

The real reason people have for endorsing the monuments is to perpetuate the racism implicit in slavery. Many southerners never got over the loss of their ability to own other people. This belief system has been passed from generation to generation. Southern states have consistently fought the expansion of rights to African Americans every step of the way. If they couldn't be owned as slaves anymore, they could at least be prevented from having "white people" rights. Indeed, the largest period of construction for the monuments was in the early 1900s, at the same time as "Jim Crow" laws were passed in the South, enforcing racial segregation, and when the Klu Klux Klan flourished. The second greatest period of construction was in the 1950s and 60s, in opposition to the Civil Rights movement.

The monuments symbolize one thing and one thing only: A preternatural dedication to racist hate. They should all come down.

Right of secession

The experience of the Civil War, though, does raise deeper issues, the first of which is the right of secession. Does a distinct group within a nation have a right to secede, and if so, in what circumstances? Indeed, given the history of countries, why would anyone want to be part of one.

“Over time the world, which formerly was (and in essence still is) a collection of cultures, evolved into a collection of nations. Borders were sewn up (this process is now being completed), passports were introduced, and the concept of personal identity shifted from cultural to national.

Furthermore, throughout the entire period of human existence different groups have struggled to achieve dominance. In this process the critical factor determining success has been their degree of social cohesiveness. Groups with great cohesiveness, with strong feelings of group identity and purpose, were able to overcome other less cohesive societies. The development of nations was therefore inevitable, since it enabled a clearer, stronger sense of identity to be formed, and appealed to, through "nationalism," and hence it created an advantage over other groups.

It is also profoundly disturbing that the origins of nationalism lie in "racism," albeit with a broader meaning but the same undertone. In its original usage a nation was a race - most nations were ethnically homogenous - and quite often the national goal was to dominate other nations, i.e., other races.

Now we have nations, founded as they are on the techniques of war, and on bigotry, and for all intents and purposes we are stuck with them. Any effective movements toward achieving world peace must confront the fact that the dominant form of social organization has as its predicate preparation for war.”

(From my article *The Birth of Nations*, in Part 3 of the University of Life website, originally published in the book *Freedom From Form*.)

I also believe that the period of the nation/state, in the overall process of human social evolution, will - regardless of how firmly it is established at the moment - only be temporary. We will move past it and its ideological foundations, to new and more democratic forms of social organization. I envision a return to a world of cultures, with “cultural” governments, as well as regional and worldwide alliances that focus on specific issues, including the protection of nature; regulation of business; responding to aggression - human-created crises; and responding to natural catastrophes.

This also includes the idea of sovereignty, that national governments can do literally anything that they want, and the rest of the world has no right to intervene. As global society is restructured away from nation/states, there will corresponding restrictions placed on sovereignty.

Returning to the idea of secession or separatism, distinct groups within a nation do have a right to break away, if they are being repressed or otherwise exploited. But this argument does not apply to the South. The South wanted to secede to deny people rights, not to gain them. Rather, black slaves, had they been able to organize, rebel and establish free areas, would have been completely justified in breaking these areas away from the southern states.

Freedom of speech

There is one other issue surrounding the confederate monuments, the question of freedom of speech. This is the fundamental right under democracy to be able to say what you want. While you may not be able to act on your hate of others, such as through assault, you do have the right to scream it at the top of your lungs.

As with all rights, there are corresponding obligations and even restrictions. For restrictions, these in turn are specified by the national government in question. Germany, reflecting its past, puts more restrictions on freedom of speech than does the United States. In Germany, Neo-Nazi voices are not permitted. Instead, they are shut down.

The United States, though, also has restrictions. The first concerns making outright threats against other individuals, such as a declaration of violent intent. These statements are illegal. They are prosecuted as “terroristic threats.”

More general is the issue of “hate speech” or “hate crimes,” statements and other acts that denigrate an entire group, although these too are often directed at specific individuals from the group. While some hate crimes (e.g., graffiti, burning crosses) are not accompanied by a separately criminal act of physical violence, they do have an unmistakable menace and which causes the targets to feel fear. In other words, this is also a type of verbal or physical assault. In the United States, laws against hate crimes vary by state (guess in what region they are the most lenient!), but they are also, and typically, enforced under federal law.

So, returning to the the South, while marching KKK members, Neo-Nazis and White Supremacists may have the right to shout their feelings, the Confederate monuments are hateful acts - the embodiment of hate crimes. They should not be protected under the guise of freedom of speech, and - again - should all come down..

Monuments to Aung San Suu Kyi

With this as background, we can now make better sense of the situation in Burma (aka Myanmar), with its political leader.

Aung San Suu Kyi has received many awards over the years. The most notable include the Nobel Peace Prize, the European Sakharov Prize, and the Congressional Gold Medal. There are countless others.

She got the awards because she was viewed both as a symbol and an actual leader of the movement for a better future for the country, towards real democracy beginning with the freedom of speech.

For years this was accepted truth - that she was such an individual. There were so many awards this led to a perspective of Suu Kyi, both inside Burma and internationally, that she was nothing less than a saint and could do no wrong.

But, there was also evidence, from real life, that she was not this person. A few analysts, I count myself as the very first, wrote that her portrait was wrong. Saying this was like walking into a tidal wave.

Now, though, the real Aung San Suu Kyi has been revealed. She is a racist and hates Muslims generally and the Rohingya people specifically. (In this way she is no different from a Southern leader “defending” slavery.) Her office has helped orchestrate the dehumanization campaign necessary to get the broader Burma public worked up to a genocidal fervor. And, she has remained not only silent about the crimes against humanity which resulted, from the mob and her military dictatorship partners, she has actually both denied them and mischaracterized them, at every opportunity. Suu Kyi is directly complicit in a massive state-organized hate crime that has seen thousands of Rohingya villagers killed, hundreds if not thousands of women raped, and the forced exodus of the bulk of the group’s population to neighboring Bangladesh.

To return to her prizes and awards, these are effectively monuments. They are not statues - we generally wait until someone dies before making a statue of them - but they are monuments nonetheless. Therefore, and as with the Confederate monuments, and now that her true nature is on display, we are faced with the question: What should be done with them?

There are differences, of course. The Confederate monuments were built many decades after the Civil War. They were also constructed at a time when the entire rational world already knew that the South was wrong: Slavery is indefensible. But with Suu Kyi, she got her monuments while she was alive, and her true character only became apparent much later.

We cannot criticize the organizations for giving her the awards. Her actions did appear selfless, even noble. But today, in light of what has happened over the last five years, she is no longer a deserving recipient. Rather, she is literally one of the last people on earth who should receive these honors. All of Suu Kyi’s awards are so egregious at this point - genocide in its severity is a corollary to mass slavery - that they have become monuments to hate. I would argue that her honors can now be viewed as hate crimes themselves. Absolutely and without question, and as with the Confederate statues one final time, they should all be taken away.

Oxford University and Oxford City led the way with this - well done!, but the Nobel Committee is resisting. It has said that there is no procedure for revoking a Prize. This is ridiculous. Of

course a Prize can be revoked. If there is no provision for it, then just enact one. The Norwegians are hesitating because they don't want to give in to the criticism that the Peace Prize already regularly receives, and likely also because they don't want to harm Norwegian commercial interests in Burma. (If they take away Suu Kyi's prize, her government could easily reject all future Norwegian business proposals. Yes - this is how corrupt the world is when it is organized under nation/states and which in turn are dominated by business interests!)

What the Committee should understand, though, is that Suu Kyi is still around. Her story is not yet over. Her alliance with the military dictatorship, now grounded in Burman Buddhist ultra-nationalism, may easily get even worse in the coming years. The question is already being asked: After the Rohingya, who will be targeted next? Burma may become a complete pariah, akin to North Korea, and with which only fellow dictatorships China and Russia will be willing to deal. The Nobel Committee should publicly take away her prize, now, on the merits, and not at a later date when the act will be viewed as openly political and when even Norwegian companies will be boycotting the country.

Indeed, Burma's other ethnic nationality groups have their own difficult questions to answer. It may well be that to escape the Rohingya's fate they have no alternative but to secede. Suu Kyi's real legacy may be the dissolution of the very nation that her father helped create.

Given what I said earlier, such groups would then be ahead of the curve in human social evolution, basically repeating the success of the breakup of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (into seven separate and now democratic and peaceful countries), and where the Serbs acted as genocidal dictators, mirroring the role of Suu Kyi's Burmans.

Finally, it is of course not only the Peace Prize. All of her awards must be revoked. The last thing the world needs is more monuments to hate.