

**From:** [David Kraemer](#)  
**To:** [Covid Affiliate Archives](#)  
**Subject:** FW: One Person's Response to Communal Fear 6.30.20  
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**From:** Morris Allen <mojo210al@icloud.com>  
**Sent:** Tuesday, June 30, 2020 9:45 AM  
**To:** MOJO210AL <MOJO210AL@aol.com>  
**Subject:** One Person's Response to Communal Fear 6.30.20

(weird-had to be resent 25 minutes after I thought I sent it)

WAGON WHEEL CENSUS      10 Bicyclists      8 Cars      5 People Fishing      4 Walkers      2 Runners      2 Trucks      1 Dog Walker

My first encounter with a “lost cause” were not the monuments constructed to honor the defeated South inside America. My first encounter with a “lost cause” was a textual one in 3<sup>rd</sup> grade in Day School when we studied the “Eigl Hazahav”—the Golden Calf episode found in the book of Shemot/Exodus. In this case, there was no statue to gaze upon, there was only a text to ponder and a people to criticize. In this case, the statue was crafted to reclaim a past that was filled with death and destruction, pain and poverty. In this case the builders of the statue were the very people whose liberation we embrace but whose foibles we also do not erase. Reading of this group of newly liberated folks, we forgot for a moment that they had a future that continues to unfold to this day—and yet they themselves were drawn to imagine a past with a revisionist take that is filled with perverted logic. Given an opportunity at self-rule and freedom, they thought they needed a physical reminder to provide the security that only they could ultimately create. The funny thing is that while there was a certain amount of an erasure culture back then and the statue destroyed, the story remains a part of our sacred heritage. It is as if the text is telling us that idols of the past may disappear, but their memory must always be recorded so that future generations know that humanity seeks comfort in the past at the expense of the work that is necessary to ensure a future.

On Friday, Phyllis emailed me an article that was to appear in print only on Sunday in the NYT. Entitled, “You Want a Confederate Monument? My Body Is A Confederate Monument...” by Caroline Randall Williams, it is a necessary read for anyone trying to understand the experience of the African-American community 155 plus years after the end of the Civil War. It is a stunning rebuke to those who claim that removing monuments erasing a part of the American story. Those monuments, revisionist tools to redirect the narrative of the war itself, have remained as reminders of the difficulty in creating the “more perfect Union” we sought. For standing in front of all are the real monuments, as it were, to the legacy of slavery inside our society. Williams writes, ***“I am proof. I am proof that whatever else the South might have been, or might believe itself to be, it was and is a space whose prosperity and sense of romance and nostalgia was built on the grievous exploitation of black life. The dream version of the Old South never existed. Any manufactured monument to that time in that place tells half a truth at best....I am quite literally made of the***

***reasons to strip them of their laurels.***” In this stunningly powerful piece, Williams describes the notion of hypodescent, the social and legal practice of assigning a genetically mixed race person to the race with lower social standing. (that is of course at play when we are able to say that President Obama was our first Black President.) Standing in front of us all are the living monuments to the reality of what the “old South” was really about. But in our desire to smooth over troubling narratives, we would rather build a monument and protect its place inside our society than confront the truth staring us back in our faces. And that is why I believe that our sacred scriptures endure—for it does not eliminate the human desire for easy answers but records them and allows us to learn from its failure over and over again.

There are no easy answers. Nuance is difficult to live with and more difficult to teach. In a binary world of right and wrong, we have reduced all dilemmas to simple and stark categories of yes or no. We are not the first generation to do so. And sadly, we won't be the last. My friend and mentor Riv-Ellen Prell undertook a massive project to document the racism, anti-Semitism and anti-progressive bias found in the highest echelons of leadership at the University of Minnesota in the 1930's and 40's. In her work on “A Campus Divided” (<http://acampusdivided.umn.edu/>), Prell documented the University's systemic hatred of the other. And yet when the time for the University to act with the courage of its academic convictions, it too fell prey to the nostalgic longings of a past that it never really had. It could not take the steps necessary to fully come to grips with its behavior and remove the names of the perpetrators of this hatred from buildings named for the “otherwise good things” they did. And yet here again, we might be finally learning from the lessons of the sacred scriptures that have accompanied us on our journeys for generations. By recording this exhibit and research, the internet ensures us that one day another 8-year-old might encounter the “golden calf” story of the University of Minnesota. There she will discover that Coffman and Nicholson weren't the folks they were said to be—and finally—finally an accounting of their behavior will be in order so that what remains is the story but not the names, the buildings but not the honor. I guess what I want to really say today is that what sacred scriptures, Williams and Prell are all teaching us is that never give up on people and yet never turn any of us into stone cold monuments to our lives. Instead embrace one another and learn from the texts we write, the stories we tell and the lives we live. In that way we will never become monuments for one generation to tear down—for our lives will be simply be instructive not idols to a past that is never fully complete. Morris

Sent by my iPad