

Race, Time & America: A Meditation in Three Part Disharmony

(Dedicated to the memory of my father, Hampton Carson Randolph)

Race, truly America's disgrace. Almost 400 years of protracted war based on hate. From sea to blood-stained sea, from the beginning when 1= 3/5 property, chattel, produce, not fully human, yet tempting, rape-able, bankable, a commodity, even saved Washington's legacy, fought over, a cause of war, a means of Union victory, emancipated but not freed, no freedom plan on hand, arises the Klan, then in flies Jim Crow, poll tax, separate but mo' inequality, Rosenwald tries, mo' James's die, strange fruit harvested amidst the amber waves of grain, no stopping, no hiring, Great Migration, white race riots, veterans murdered, whose free? So much for US liberty, at last, nearly a century late, Brown v. Board, Till Death do us part, Emmett Till, Rosa, Martin, Malcolm, Stokely, Selma, dogs and batons, church kids fire-bombed, civil rights bill, devolution to George Wallace, assassinations, rage, cities stew, many still not remade, equal opportunity for the lucky/gifted few, incarcerated slavery, a nation determinedly blind to slave boats, shackles, chains, jumping in the sea, sharks, who anyway can be free, Mr. Commie? Barack Kenyan-born, why can't we get along, ask Treyvon, Michael Brown, Black Lives Matter, whose lives, what's the matter, just taking a knee, respect for being truly free, Charleston, a place of worship, a sanctuary breached by racial hate, Charlottesville, both sides at fault, permission for the right-alt, its getting late, now gutting the legacy of Martin and Bobby, leveling Lincoln, Miss Liberty looking wobbly, her lamp clouded, unable for us to see, a return again to disaffirmed action, code language for Make America Hate Again, part of the ongoing American domestic war over slavery's legacy. Brings us to here, to now, to what is to be of us, of equality, of racial indifference and of being free, still the war rages, where is Martin's mountain top, before your eyes, still not a mirage, visible, shining, like Reagan's City on a Hill, but different as this dream belongs to all, it must, for you and me, not just for a paunchy golfer, carting away the freedoms of the rest of us.

And brings us to this day, here, where we must do two things now: recognize openly and honestly a past in Albemarle County that is our low point for justice and then resolve to apply that past to today and for the future of our county:

We must begin with acknowledging our official trespasses and sins in Albemarle County where in the past our county failed to live up to the rights and promises enshrined in the US and Virginia constitutions:

We begin here with the Board of Supervisors of Albemarle County today affirming that:

*we repudiate the vile murder of John Henry James 120 years ago.

*we express our regret that due process of law, enshrined in the 5th and 14th amendments, was not rendered to Mr. James by local law enforcement officials.

*we recognize the injustice that not one of the citizens who murdered, mutilated and dismembered Mr. James was ever accused, yet alone tried, for their illegal actions or for his murder.

*we regret that the white citizenry of Albemarle County never voiced disdain for the blatant murder of a fellow Albemarle citizen.

*we acknowledge that the Albemarle County Board of Supervisors of 1898 failed in their obligation to demand that justice be done to identify and charge the individuals associated with Mr. James's murder.

*we condemn Albemarle County's law enforcement officials and local judges for not recommending yet alone undertaking an investigation of Mr. James's murder, especially after law officials did seek to prevent the murder of Mr. James.

*we identify that there is only one explanation for this collective Albemarle community refusal to respond to Mr. James's murder and for the collective amnesia about Mr. James's constitutional rights: racism.

*we honor the memory of John Henry James by declaring July 12th is John Henry James day in Albemarle County

*we extend our heartfelt appreciation to Dr. Jalane Schmidt and Dr. Andrea Douglas and the City of Charlottesville's Blue Ribbon Commission for their initiative and research on the lynching of John Henry James.

We have certainly learned since 2008 and especially since last August that the past is never really past. But if we don't keep working to have that new day turn over, if we give up pursuing Gatsby's orgiastic green light at the end of each of our docks, if we submit the flaws of American democracy exceed its possibilities and if we seek to ignore that America's historic and powerful current runs deep, towards more inclusion, more tolerance and more recognition of the worth and dignity of every one of its citizens, residents and immigrants, legal and illegal, then we will have failed our country, our duty, our responsibility to help fulfill the true promises of the US Constitution. We will have failed as surely as the Tory who left the 13 colonies for Canada in 1776, as the Union deserter on Cemetery Hill on July 3, 1863 and as the president who repeatedly represents Russian geopolitical interests ahead of our national interests.

Let us keep working together towards a more inclusive and equitable America where the hue of one's skin will be as relevant one day as the time of day of one's birth.

"Let us die to make us all free, his truth is marching on."

We travel with those of you headed to Montgomery tomorrow, if not in body, than at least in spirit.