

American Icons

From Lincoln to the Surf Nazis

by Roger D. McGrath



H. Ward Stettin

“**T**hou shalt not portray a white male in an heroic light.” Thus reads the first commandment of the politically correct. Ever since the late 1960’s, the cultural Marxists have been engaged in a drive to destroy American heroes—if they are white males. This was not always a difficult task. Historians from an earlier generation had already begun to chip away at these heroes. Washington, Jefferson, Jackson, Lincoln, and Teddy Roosevelt were vulnerable to revisionist interpretations because they had often been treated not just simply but simplistically. Complex and imperfect human beings were reduced to pure and virtuous icons—soft targets, made-to-order for debunkers and revisionists. What was a largely worthwhile effort to paint more sophisticated, nuanced, and penetrating portraits of American icons, however, became, in the hands of the cultural Marxists, a mission to destroy the legitimacy of the figures altogether—part of a broader effort to deconstruct Western civilization.

Why people become cultural Marxists and engage in such a mission is a question for psychologists. Do they hate themselves? Their parents? Their religion? What dysfunction causes them to loathe the nation and civilization of their birth? What trauma or alienation causes them to hate the things most of us love? I remember a strange, cynical, and cowardly character I first encountered in junior high school. He mocked all our heroes, from real life and on the silver screen. He took no joy in the triumphs of Americans. He soon found a little group of like-minded craven cynics. At the time, I could not understand how anyone could think like these kids. When I (and everyone I knew until junior high) watched *The Sands of Iwo Jima* and saw the flag being raised on Mt. Suribachi—with The

Marines’ Hymn growing louder—I had a lump the size of a grapefruit in my throat and goose pimples from head to toe. I did not know that there was any other way to feel. It stunned me to come into contact with kids who did not share my feelings. My shock turned to rage when they mocked the flag-raising. Mom, the flag, apple pie, and the Corps were honored in our household.

It took me some time to begin to understand, at least in part, what motivated such kids. I learned that they came from families who were far to the left of the American mainstream and that they themselves were pusillanimous to the core. I suspect they knew that they would never have the inclination to join the Corps nor the courage of those in the 28th Marines who assaulted Suribachi. Nor would they have the courage of a Washington or a Jackson or a Teddy Roosevelt. These men did not serve to inspire but left them frightened and intimidated. Their reaction to the heroism of such great Americans was to mock them in a clearly palpable attempt to protect their own fragile psyches. Years later, when political correctness was added to the mix, they were able not only to make fun of our heroes but to disparage, denigrate, and, ultimately, demonize them. Thus, George Washington is evil because he owned slaves; Andrew Jackson is evil because he fought Indians; Teddy Roosevelt is evil because he proclaimed the superiority of the white race. Even Thomas Jefferson is evil not only because he owned slaves but because, although there is no real evidence to support the claim, he bedded Sally Hemings. And so it goes, *ad infinitum*.

Accepting the standards imposed by the politically correct eliminates nearly every white man from our pantheon of heroes: South of the Mason-Dixon Line, most prominent and wealthy men were slaveholders; most men who lived on the frontier were Indian fighters; nearly all white men everywhere once considered other races inferior. If historians or others ac-

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cept politically correct standards and superimpose them on men who lived one or two hundred years ago, they will be led, inexorably, to the destruction of those same men. Some historians accept these standards—at least ostensibly, when writing biographies of famous figures—but also attempt to preserve the heroic status of those figures. This forces them to rationalize, occasionally in the most convoluted manner, the beliefs, statements, and actions of their biographical subjects.

While the stature of most American heroes has been diminished under the withering attacks of the revisionists and the cultural Marxists, Abraham Lincoln continues to enjoy an iconic status, and some of his supporters are cultist in their devotion. Yet Lincoln was certainly a “racist”: He believed not only that the white and black races were strikingly different in both physical appearance and mental capacity but that Negroes, by their very nature, would never be able to live in equality among whites. Said Lincoln:

I believe this government was made on the white basis. I believe it was made by white men, for the benefit of white men and their posterity forever, and I am in favor of confining citizenship to white men, men of European birth and descent, instead of conferring it upon Negroes, Indians, and other inferior races.

He also said:

I am not, nor ever have been in favor of making voters or jurors of Negroes, nor of qualifying them to hold office. There is a physical difference between the white and black races, which, I believe, will forever forbid the two races living together on terms of social and political equality. I as much as any other man, am in favor of having the superior position assigned to the white race.

Although Lincoln hated slavery, thinking it a “monstrous injustice” and a bane to both the white and black races, he wanted all freed blacks sent to Africa or colonized on a Caribbean island or in Central America. He was a member of the American Colonization Society, which had, by the time he joined, shipped several thousand American blacks to Liberia. At the height of the Civil War, he was still exploring ways to ship all American Negroes overseas and only abandoned the idea when the U.S. Navy and others convinced him that, given the Union’s resources at the time, such an ambitious undertaking was logistically impossible. Nonetheless, he thought the means to effect overseas colonization would have to be found, because any kind of integration with Negroes filled him and other whites with “natural disgust.” He commonly referred to blacks as “niggers” in private and even, occasionally, in public.

For generations, historians have noted Lincoln’s attitude toward blacks. The first to draw significant attention to it, though, was Lerone Bennett, Jr., in his essay “Was Abe Lincoln a White Supremacist?” published in *Ebony* in 1968. All of his information had long been available in numerous secondary sources. Bennett, however, was black, the article was published in a black magazine, and the time was propitious for an attack on a white man regarded as a hero by most blacks. In the late 60’s, the establishment was being attacked by blacks and whites, left and right. Black rioters swept through city after city, screaming “Burn, baby, burn!” and radical black activists, such as the

Black Panthers, were attracting large followings. Bennett’s attack on Lincoln lent credence to the rhetoric of these radicals, especially those advocating the separation of the races.

Considering all this, it would, at first, seem surprising that Lincoln has maintained his iconic stature. However, most authors who have attacked Lincoln, for reasons distinct and separate from those of the craven cynics, black radicals, and cultural Marxists, have been Southerners, constitutionalists, and libertarians. The liberals and the politically correct have reacted by rallying to Lincoln’s defense. Eric Foner, a leftist professor of history at Columbia University, did so in a 2000 *Los Angeles Times* review of Bennett’s *Forced Into Glory: Abraham Lincoln’s White Dream*. Foner argues, gently and tactfully, that Bennett has produced a polemic that does not address the breath and depth of Lincoln—and I think Foner is right. On the other hand, Foner too quickly dismisses Lincoln’s words and actions concerning racial issues, asserting that Lincoln simply shared the prejudices of the time. This is exactly what Lincoln did not do. He carefully thought through all of these issues and came to his conclusions after years of observation and experience.

Leftist reviewers and Lincoln cultists have not been so gentle or tactful when criticizing Thomas J. DiLorenzo’s *The Real Lincoln*. DiLorenzo, a professor of economics at Loyola College in Maryland, argues that the Civil War was more about economics—the tariff, in particular—than about slavery and that Lincoln did not govern but ruled tyrannically and left us with a federal leviathan and less liberty. When Joseph Sobran finishes his book on Lincoln, which develops similar themes, I suspect *berserk* will be the mildest reaction of the Lincolnites.

Support from the left and attacks from the right make Lincoln’s case anomalous. Although Lincoln clearly and unequivocally believed and stated that the Negro race was inferior and that the United States was a singular nation created for whites and their descendants in perpetuity, he presided over a war that not only freed the slaves but destroyed the social structure of the South, greatly diminished states’ rights, centralized power in Washington, and created a secular religion of egalitarianism—all dear to the hearts of those on the left. Moreover, he died, using the word loosely, a martyr. He remains an American icon—despite the best efforts of black separatists, Southern conservatives, constitutionalists, and libertarians.

Lincoln has fared far better than George Washington, who has come under fire of late because he was a slave owner. In 1997, the Orleans Parish School Board removed Washington’s name from an elementary school in New Orleans, in accordance with the board’s policy that schools not be named for anyone who owned slaves. Berrenger Brechtie, the president of the school board, said, “The idea of kids going to a school named after a slave owner was demeaning. We wanted the kids to identify with role models from their own heritage.” That Washington manumitted his slaves in his will apparently counts for nothing. Renamed in honor of Dr. Charles Drew, a black physician who developed methods to preserve blood plasma, the school is 99 percent black. The name change has done nothing to improve the school’s abysmal academic performance. Despite boasting one teacher for every 13 students, the school’s fifth grade (its highest grade level) scored only in the 14th percentile on the Iowa tests in 2000. Perhaps it is best that Washington’s name is no longer associated with the school.

Washington was the first of several warrior presidents. He set the standard high. Standing 6’3” and big boned, he dwarfed

most of his contemporaries. The stare of his blue-gray eyes froze people in their tracks. His years as a surveyor on the frontier, while only a teenager, made him rawhide tough. He understood the lay of the land and knew more about the frontier than all others, save trappers and Indian traders. His bearing suggested that he was not one to take a step backward. He was an accomplished rider and, despite his great size, was described as a graceful horseman. He strove daily to improve himself. Recognizing these qualities, Robert Dinwiddie, Governor of Virginia, made a 20-year-old Washington the adjutant of one of Virginia's four military districts in 1752. The next year, Dinwiddie selected him to carry the governor's message to the French, warning them to withdraw from the Ohio country. Leading a small party through incessant, pelting rain and a wilderness of forests and rivers, Washington eventually arrived at Ft. Le Boeuf, immediately south of Lake Erie. Changing out of buckskins and into his Virginia militia uniform, Major Washington presented the governor's missive to a French general. After days of delay, the French only agreed to forward the letter to Quebec. Washington used the time to record everything he saw: numbers of troops, deployment, the daily routine, Indian allies. With snow falling and the rivers beginning to freeze, Washington made his way back to Virginia. His military career had begun, and the French and Indian War was about to erupt.

Washington's first action—and the first action of the war—occurred the following spring when, leading a few dozen militiamen, Washington surprised a slightly larger group of French troops, killing ten of them and capturing twice that number. Washington was elated, saying that he had “heard the bullets whistle” and had found “something charming in the sound.” Within weeks, he was promoted to colonel and made commander of the Virginia Regiment. He was 22 years old. Throughout the war, he fought against great odds, made mistakes and recovered to gain valuable experience, demonstrated great courage and an indomitable spirit, inspired confidence and loyalty in the men who served under him, and led from the front. He would go on to command the Continental Army, create a trained and disciplined fighting force out of those who survived the winter at Valley Forge, accept the British surrender at Yorktown, preside over the Constitutional Convention at Philadelphia, and serve as our first president. But the Father of Our Country owned slaves and is not fit to have his name on a grammar school.

Andrew Jackson, an iconic figure who has come under withering fire from the left over the last couple of generations, is my favorite president, not so much for his presidency but for his character and life. You would think that his humble beginnings—he was the first president not born into wealth—and contempt for artificial social distinctions might endear him to liberals. However, he was a brilliant success without government aid, fought Indians, and had courage that boggles the mind. On several occasions, Jackson was seen standing in the face of withering fire while rallying his troops. At Enotachopco Creek during the War of 1812, the Red Stick Creeks pounced on Jackson and his Tennessee militia. Some of the raw recruits broke and ran, but Jackson stood “firm and energetic . . . his example and his authority alike contributed to arrest the flying, and give confidence to those who maintained their ground. . . . In the midst of a shower of balls . . . he was seen . . . rallying the alarmed, halting them in flight, forming his columns, and inspiring them by his example.” His leadership turned the tide of

battle and, eventually, put the Red Sticks to flight. Jackson lost 20 men, but the Red Sticks left more than 200 dead behind on the battlefield, and as many as 100 more later died of their wounds.

Jackson displayed such courage, cool nerve, willpower, and leadership throughout his life, yet today's American-history textbooks mention little of it. In more than a dozen textbooks that publishers have sent to me for review over the last two decades, I have found not one line on the battle at Enotachopco Creek. Their treatment of other American heroes is similarly neglectful.

I grew up in the aftermath of World War II, so the heroes of the 20th century's greatest conflict are of particular interest to me. I have a copy of *Life* from 1945. On the cover is a beaming, auburn-haired, blue-eyed, freckle-faced kid named Audie Murphy, the most decorated American soldier not only of World War II but of any war in our history. He had just turned 20 when the photo was taken—and he looks 15. He enlisted when he was 17 (the official record says 18), and, by the time he was only a few months past his 19th birthday, he had risen from private to 1st lieutenant and had been awarded 33 medals, including the Medal of Honor, the French Croix de Guerre, the French Legion d'Honneur, the Distinguished Service Cross, the Legion of Merit, three Silver Stars, two Bronze Stars, and three Purple Hearts.

What he did in Sicily, Italy, France, and Germany pushes the limits of credulity. He could easily have been awarded another Medal of Honor and another Distinguished Service Cross. Yet Audie Murphy is not mentioned in any of the textbooks that I have received. Nor can I find America's first hero of the war, Colin Kelly; or the first ace, Butch O'Hare; or the leading ace, Dick Bong; or the top Naval ace, Dave McCampbell; or the top Marine ace, Pappy Boyington; or the leading submarine ace, Dick O'Kane. On the other hand, considerable space is allotted to subjects of little significance, except to achieve some kind of politically correct balance. It is difficult not to conclude that the authors and publishers fear portraying white men in an heroic light. Such portrayals just might inspire boys today to behave in a manner admired by their ancestors.

A couple of years ago, I took my family to see Michael Flatley's *Lord of the Dance*. We were thrilled and found the music, choreography, and performances inspired, even brilliant. The next morning, I read a reviewer who attacked the production as militaristic and fascist. I laughed at first, but then it became clear to me that the reviewer had been frightened by what he saw—the Gaelic tribe on the march, tapping into ancient rituals and soul-stirring melodies. *We can't have that!*

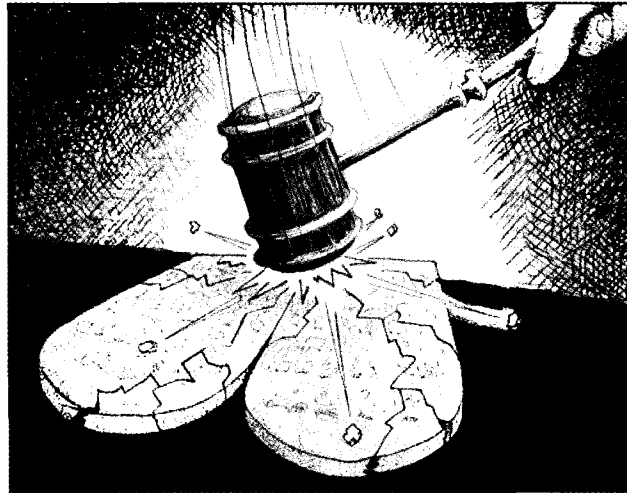
In 1978, I saw the same reaction among several reviewers of *Big Wednesday*, a movie about surfing and coming of age. The book of the same name was written by Denny Aaberg, my childhood buddy. We practically lived at each other's houses in Pacific Palisades and began surfing together in the late 50's. Denny's story is closely based on our lives growing up and those of his older brother, Kemp, and other surfers in the Palisades, such as Lance Carson. John Milius helped turn the story into a screenplay and then directed the movie. It was supposed to be a slice of surfing life and of the struggle to accept adult responsibilities—and it is. However, some reviewers, ostensibly sane and rational, saw the movie as a celebration of neo-Nazis. One even described a principal character as having a “sleek Aryan hardbody.” Hitler Youth? *And we thought we were just surfing.*

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The Federal Courts, a Menorah, and the Ten Commandments

Whose Religious Iconography Is Constitutional?

by Stephen B. Presser



H. Ward Storch

A recent phenomenon in the United States is that no one knows any longer to what extent the country, our states, or our municipalities can participate in the display of such traditional religious symbols as crèches, crosses, menorahs, or even the Ten Commandments. Until the last half of the 20th century, no one seemed too concerned about the problem. Then—while retooling the Constitution with regard to criminal procedure, reapportionment, and racial segregation—the Supreme Court, under Chief Justice Earl Warren, declared, for the first time in U.S. history, that it was impermissible for states or municipalities to mandate Bible reading or prayer in public-school classrooms. The Supreme Court’s rationale was that the First Amendment, which prohibited Congress from making any law “respecting an establishment of religion,” ought to be interpreted as forbidding any state or local government from imposing any religion on its citizens. The amendment, declared the Court, quoting an 1802 letter written by Thomas Jefferson to the Danbury Baptists in Connecticut, erects a “wall of separation” between Church and State.

There has been a spate of recent writing on the history of the First Amendment and on Church-State relations in the early republic. Even the academy is beginning to understand that Jefferson’s view was not commonly shared, and, more importantly, that Jefferson himself had no doubt that the First Amend-

ment only prohibited acts by the federal legislature, not those of the states. In the early 20th century, however, the Supreme Court began to declare that the 14th Amendment, passed in the wake of the Civil War in order to guarantee blacks the same property and contract rights and legal protection as whites, somehow fundamentally altered what the states could and could not do. The Court declared that the 14th Amendment’s prohibition on any state depriving any person of the “equal protection of the laws,” or taking any person’s property without “due process,” or depriving anyone of the “privileges and immunities” of U.S. citizens meant that most of the restrictions that had formerly been applied to the federal government by the Bill of Rights should now be applied to the states. This was unparalleled judicial legerdemain, since those amendments had been expressly designed to protect the states and their citizens in the exercise of self-government; to turn those amendments into tools that federal officials could use to dictate how the states run virtually every aspect of their governments was fundamentally to fly in the face of their original intention.

While there was, at first, some resistance to the Warren Court’s bolder efforts in this regard, it is remarkable how this “Government by Judiciary,” as one critic called it, came to be so accepted. Indeed, during the last 40 years, to point out the obvious ways in which the Court (particularly in cases involving religion) had misread the Constitution was to court ridicule among the *cognoscenti*. Most law professors and most judges seemed willing to have the Court essentially rewrite the Constitution according to the justices’ opinions of what ought to be

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