

## On Being Drummed Out Of American History

William Herbert "Skip" Boyer, 32°

*"History is an imperfect record of imperfect people doing their damndest to achieve something."*

It's time to say farewell to most of my heroes. It saddens me, because I am going to miss them. It also saddens me to learn that they were such poor role models that they are now being drummed out of American history. I'm ashamed that I was so politically incorrect, so insensitive, that I ever thought them worth emulating.

I should be grateful, I know, to those who have called these errors in judgment to my attention. A few years ago, a group of American educational leaders put forth new standards for teaching history in the United States. Now, I know that intelligent, thoughtful academicians would never have put forth these standards unless they were absolutely certain beyond a shadow of a doubt that Thomas Edison wasn't worth discussing, that everything John D. Rockefeller did was criminal and that the Wright Brothers made no significant contributions. The fact that they've left Alexander Graham Bell out of their revisionist history may not be all bad. I've often questioned the value of the telephone, myself. Still, there are those who would argue that voice transmission is of some worth.

However, the embarrassing fact remains that most of my heroes are now out. Secretly, I will miss them. As I grew up, their achievements were my youthful benchmarks. As I grew older, my admiration for them increased because I discovered that they were really human beings--imperfect, struggling, flawed. Still, they were remarkable human beings set in remarkable times. Judged by the standards of today, some were ruthless, perhaps. Judged against the standards of the times in which they lived, well...which of us claims to have been given the right to make that judgment?

My heroes are a diverse group. Many proudly wore the Square and Compasses. Still, it doesn't take long to see what a politically incorrect bunch they truly are.

◆ William Bradford, governor of the Plymouth colony, author of its remarkable history and a force behind the equally remarkable *Mayflower Compact*.

◆ Robert E. Lee, a man who followed his conscience and who gave us a great gift at a time when it was most needed. When he finally surrendered his Army of Northern Virginia, he surrendered it completely, instead of letting it fade into the hills to carry on a guerrilla warfare that would have lasted well into this century.

◆ Mark Twain, the writer who defined America humor and focused it squarely on the injustices of the day. And whose books are sometimes thrown out of school libraries today by individuals who can barely read.

◆ Col. William F. Cody, who bridged the gap between old and the new West, personifying both the good and the bad of his times.

- ◆ Chief Joseph of the Nez Perce, who brought dignity to a tragic moment.
- ◆ Frederick Douglass, a voice of reason in any time.

My heroes include others, as well. Lincoln, Jefferson, Henry Clay, Ben Franklin, Jonas Salk, Willa Cather, Crazy Horse, Grenville Dodge and the Casement brothers. I'm fond of Henry Raymond, Stephen Vincent Benet and James Gordon Bennett. Karr Van Anda, the great managing editor of the New York Times around the turn of the century, comes to mind. And so it goes. A diverse group.

A few on my list will probably remain in the official, politically correct version of American history, largely by virtue of their gender or ethnic background. The others, largely white males, will simply have to go--victims of narrow-minded, self-serving individuals unable to recognize that history is an imperfect record of imperfect people doing their damndest to achieve something.

History has always been written by those with the time and the education to do so. That brings a class bias to their work. It's been that way since the Venerable Bede and, no doubt, continues to this very moment. Retrofitting trendy new ideas to people, dreams and events of the past does not solve the problem. Nor does ignoring their accomplishments, both good and bad.

I'm going to miss these people who have become my friends down the years. I think we all will discover our revised official history to be meaner and smaller in spirit because of their absence. And I do wonder this: Just what will history make of those who have drafted these "standards" in say, 50 or 100 years? I can make a pretty good guess. Lee, Edison and Company will have the final victory. They will still be remembered long after the concept of "political correctness" has been put, finally, in its place. A small place, tiny and ignored against the greater sweep of the history of a civilization.