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Life, Flight and Liberty Part XVI

An essay by Henry Nicolle

History, Historians and Sausage-Making

As we close 2018 and enter 2019, the departing year leaves us with a wealth of experience that we will surely abandon to the past. It is our humanity that decrees this folly. I don't know why that should be, but it always is the case. The past is behind us, let bygones be bygones. Don't dwell in the past, look to the future!

I am curious, just how much of that advice is wise or even plausible? Perhaps on a person to person level, it may make a little sense. We all make mistakes that we usually do not repeat. We are all subject to errors of judgement that we usually regret. To forgive and forget is probably a good rule for keeping the peace with family and neighbors and to maintain one's own sanity. The good of our neighbors in our experiences should not be forgotten.

I cannot extend that grace so far that we should forgive and forget the lies, deceptions, and betrayals our leadership customarily bestows upon our credulity. We should especially not forget serious abuse of our innocence.

A recent leader once said, "Fool me once, shame on (confused silence . . .) shame on you. Fool me (more confused silence . . .) you can't get fooled again." A popular variance of the intended adage is "Fool me once, shame on you. Fool me twice, shame on me." My long experience with leaders is that this particular one knew he had no respect for the advice and in his attempt to deceive, was simply incapable of speaking the truth of the adage. Why is it that in approving leaders and leadership policies, that, we always believe the lies? Are we stupid or do we just pretend that the lies are always "Fool me once", ignoring the infinitely multiple deceptions? Are we, every one of us, inflicted with Nelson's "Blind eye"?

Speak sometime with an historian about history. If you can find one willing to speak freely, I think I can guarantee an informative and probably entertaining conversation. As often as not, the stories of history vary in tone and detail with the teller. History is fact, but the telling of history is fable.

Still, the telling of history is fascinating, filled with observations that inspire insight into our own times, lives, and experiences. Even false readings can reveal nuggets of gold.

I often refer in my writings to Lincoln's recorded acts of duplicity, deception and treason. I am not an historian, only a common opinion writer. Many, if not most, actual historians present a sanitized and politically correct interpretation of treachery to depict Lincoln as the Savior of the Union and Freer of Slaves. The facts are that the first is a half-truth and the latter is pure fabrication. Both assertions are mandated by victorious agents. Power speaks with unimpeachable authority and therefore, history as we commonly know it, follows a crooked path.

I have no bone to pick with historians. They study and report the whole-cloth of the victorious and yet, wander the curious paths of alternate realities. I recognize that their discussions and perceptions are the unique products of their specific moment in the flow of history. The currents of history are neutral, but the inherent eddies and backwashes readily invite honest, but incredibly erroneous error in the telling.

"It is what it is. . ." and simultaneously, "It is what we say it is." All true, but a bit goofy, and entertaining, too. For historians, the "truth" is an impossible holy grail.

Where is this going? About that, I am also curious. I enjoy the comments written as opinion, editorial, letters to the editor, and comments in the sports section. If and how these diverse thoughts on paper will influence the retelling of history revolving around our little moment of time challenges my imagination. Are our scribbles to be incorporated in the winner-take-all side of some future historian's ledger? Or hidden in the subversive annals of crypto-history? I suspect that if we are remembered at all, we will be merely footnoted among the ambiguous and anonymous curiosities of our period. Glass slippers among the jackboots and other residue of time? Another mystery perhaps; curiosities certain to be unravelled by future historians..

Small town history resembles big town history, only less of it. Otherwise, it is much the same. People do what people do, regardless of where they are or how many they may be. I think small town people are more fun to watch. We know each other. For the better part, I think that we are mostly amused when viewing the interaction of local government and locals not in government through the Rashomon lens. (Look it up! ;-)

I suspect that if it were not for the machinations of public administration and the effects of the Rashomon phenomena, historians as a profession would be as rare as chickens' teeth. I would regret that loss. History, in all its iterations, is filled with enlightenment, advice and entertainment.

If your entertainment prefers details, history will fill your cup to overflowing. If you are the larger picture enthusiast, there are enough large views and of great variety to keep you occupied for a lifetime. Entertainment is omnipresent in glorious historical abundance. Adventure? Intrigue? War and Peace? Fiction? (Plenty of that!) Romance? Examples abound accumulated from thousands of years of experience.

Don't like to read? Historical recollection comes in every format you may desire. We have the written form, of course, but oral tradition still exists and you probably missed the boat if you imagine that history is boring and difficult. Look at comic books, movies, videos, podcasts, live action on stage and more! These are all forms of the oral tradition, in evolved modern technological methodology. Fiction assimilates history so as to make them inseparable (and much more fun.)

Don't be too surprised to see how local personal reputations can be reformed by the interesting revelatory disclosures of differences between what is purportedly disclosed in public forums and what truth is concealed. If our current constituency fails to provide guidance and discipline for effective self-governance, the task falls upon future historians to illuminate and document the rise and fall of our society. Gibbon devoted six volumes to the Roman empire's life. Ours will undoubtedly be more attuned to the character of the dime-store novel. Maybe I'm wrong. On the other hand, when was the last time (first time still pending?) that our community cared enough to openly discuss the problem of important public decisions made without public discussion?

Just asking, today. In a hundred years, ask an historian.

Just a reminder, too. Only we can do something about our problems. May we talk? Bring your opinions, anecdotes, stories and interests to your neighbors. They are very welcome and you are cordially invited!

In Carbon County, we have four active newspapers in Rawlins, Saratoga and Baggs. Collectively, they are a vital resource for community opinion, development, and cohesion. If you want to see something that you find interesting in a newspaper, subscribe and write! All of these papers beg in every issue, "Please Write!" A "Silent Majority" is no majority at all.

Henry Nicolle
henry@henrynicolle.org
POB 1194
Rawlins, Wyoming 82301
Tel: 307-321-6432