

Notes on Monuments

Written by R.B. Jones
Sunday, 23 October 2011 17:59

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The following remarks are the ones I would have made if I had been invited to the dedication of the Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial on the National Mall.

I am deeply puzzled by the events of the day at this place on the National Mall. I have been informed that this ceremony is to dedicate the Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial, the first to honor an African American on this space, which in theory belongs to all Americans. I am perplexed by this occasion and this monument. I had the privilege of meeting Dr. King when I was a teenager and I heard him give one of his elegant speeches. I must admit that at the time I had ambiguous feelings about the man.

I have never agreed with nonviolence as an all-encompassing philosophy. I am not as faith driven or as optimistic as Dr. King. Perhaps I am more of an American than I choose to acknowledge because non-violence is a temporary tactic and not a way of life. Violence is as American as cherry pie. In the 1960s, H. Rap Brown said that and it is true now now than ever before.

This nation is involved in at least six armed conflicts that are openly acknowledged. In recent days there has been saber rattling by this country toward Iran. It is alleged that Iran tried to solicit the murder of the Saudi ambassador to the U.S. in Washington D.C.

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Some elected officials are suggesting that Iran has committed an act of war against the U.S. This nation is quick to use force and let loose the dogs of war. It is ironic that this nation would choose to dedicate a monument to Dr. King when the governing principles of this nation are antithetical to what he believed in during his life.

Dr. King believed in non-violence and reconciliation. He believed that humanity conferred the right to justice and dignity. The prevailing ethos of this nation in 2011 is might makes right; killing is not war unless Americans are killed in the process; the U.S. has the right to kill anyone it pleases without due process including U.S. citizens.

What does any of this have to do with Dr. King? He once said, "Any nation that spends more on weapons of war than on human needs is approaching spiritual death."

If what he said is true, then America's spirit died a long time ago. This nation currently spends more than the next 17 nations on weapons of war and the military. Much of the current political rhetoric is about cutting budget appropriations for human needs such as Social Security, housing subsidies, and college financial aid. If Dr. King were alive today, he might be demonstrating on the national mall rather than allowing his principles to be mocked at a ceremony there.

Dr. King won the Nobel Peace Prize for leading a non-violent movement against racial oppression in the U.S. and he was praised generally in the U.S. When he extended his nonviolent beliefs to U.S. foreign policy in Viet Nam, he was vilified by the U.S. media and abandoned by many former supporters.

Martin Luther King, Jr. would not feel honored by a war mongering culture.

Although building the monument was spearheaded by his fraternity brothers in Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, the inclusion of President Barack Obama and other perpetrators of America's imperial wars taint the occasion. The stench of hypocrisy hangs over the ceremony today.

The image of Dr. King, which stands on the mall should be viewed as an indictment of the

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present policies of the nation and as a warning that even the strongest nations that have ever existed militarily have all had their reckoning, and the USA is no different.

Martin Luther King, Jr.'s presence on the mall should remind visitors who are too caught up in beliefs of American exceptionalism that Dr. King was terribly right when he said, "We shall either learn to live together as brothers and sisters or perish together as fools."