

A Letter To Renew America

by William A. Cook

June 18, 1996

The Executive Director and Executive Committee Members
American Historical Association
400 A Street SE
Washington, DC 20024

Dear Colleagues:

As a professional historian holding a Ph.D. from a most prestigious university in these United States, I feel compelled to write to you concerning my recent publication, *To Renew America*. I realize that you might perceive negatively both the publicity attending its publication and, at first reading, the questionable nature of its content. The logic of presenting the book to the public with such fanfare will become obvious as I explain the rationale that guided me in determining its content.

As you know, the American public is exceedingly stupid. Recent surveys have determined that most American college students are incapable of identifying the location of states, or of recognizing in what hemispheres certain nations are located. They do not recognize major American heroes like James Gould, William Randolph Hearst, or General Sherman to mention just a few. Some do not even know why we went to war against Mexico in order to acquire the great state of California. Now if college educated people are so ignorant, you can appreciate how truly stupid the rest of the population is !

Recognizing this fact, it became clear to me that those of us in power had a responsibility to capitalize on this ignorance and present America as it should be regardless of the facts of our history. As George Bush said: *I will never say anything bad about America, despite the facts.* Amen to that!

Since I am, as a result of my incredible insight into the American mentality, the Father of the 1994 Congressional Revolution that has reshaped and redirected American governmental policy on almost every issue, I felt it was my solemn responsibility to create a "new" America based on the principles I believe will further the agenda of the far right; an agenda that must be adopted if America is to progress and rise to complete and total leadership in the world. With that in mind, I conceived of the need to present to the American people a new history of America. Since they had no knowledge of the facts, I could construct an America without fault, one in mind and determination to illumine for the whole world the essential values we've preached in the Constitution: a virtual "city on a hill," to borrow an original phrase from our past illustrious leader, Ronald Reagan. No doubt you noticed with some degree of perplexity

the statement I made in the opening chapter asserting the need to "renew American civilization":

From the arrival of English-speaking colonists in 1607 until 1965, there was one continuous civilization built around a set of commonly accepted legal and cultural principles.

I want you to know, dear colleagues, that I am sensitive that the generalization contained in this assertion would be objected to by most historians. Even the Americana Encyclopedia states that the Civil War was: ... *the culmination of a century of differences of opinion*. And I still feel sheepish trying to gloss over the Civil War, which some would reference as a major fissure in America preceding 1965, It also might call into question a set of commonly accepted legal and cultural principles. But, to put this statement into context, recognizing the all-important necessity of establishing the continuity of purpose in America from its founding, a regional conflict such as the Civil War certainly had to be expunged in light of the greater good to be achieved by emphasizing America's oneness. With the possible exception of those who live contiguous to the battlegrounds (like Gettysburg ~ and all on the East coast conveniently) few Americans probably know about the war anyway. To raise it as an issue would only confuse our purpose and require some detailed explanation as to why it does not represent a split in continuity, a task I did not relish or have time to construct.

Others have contacted me protesting that the first permanent British colony at Jamestown, Virginia was established in 1608, not 1607. But, surely, this is quibbling and misses the point. Now those who admonish me for overlooking the differences of opinion and the consequent legal and cultural conflicts caused by Roger Williams in those early years may have a bit more substance to their objection. Still, the persecution inflicted on Williams, which justly overshadows his attempts to separate church and state, was justified since he was advocating alcohol abuse and reverie (a point I should have made more of in the text). Those who contend that there were fundamental differences between the Plymouth Puritans and the Massachusetts Bay Puritans, especially in their forms of governance where one vested authority in the congregation and the other in the ecclesiastical hierarchy, raise legitimate concerns. I was fully cognizant of these fine differences, but had to reject them in my retrofitting of history if America's founding fathers were to be seen as always advocating a democratic form of governance. After all, what is more important? That a few hundred Massachusetts Bay Puritans be remembered for accepting ecclesiastical hierarchy, or that all the founders of our society had left England to establish a totally new form of government?

Historians sympathetic to the cause of Native Americans (why we can't continue to use "Indians," I do not understand) asked if I had intentionally avoided the Puritans condemnation of the "savages" as less-than-human instruments of Satan, thereby making war against them justifiable. Of what conceivable value is this information today? Are the Pequots complaining today about the battle at Mystic, Connecticut that slaughtered their ancestors as they attempted to escape from their burning village? No!

the 1884-87 depression, and the Haymarket Riot of 1886. I had anticipated this concern when I wrote the book. Why would I want to include anything about labor unrest, strikes or unions when we are finally coming to a golden era in America's relationship with industry and the elimination of unions? To do so would simply raise - unnecessarily - alternatives to our present practices. These do-gooders had even demanded that I include the fact that there were no social programs during this period for the unemployed or the down-and-out. Well, why should there be? This was the real America where individuals pulled themselves up by their bootstraps and didn't rely on handouts.

I was particularly chagrined that my colleagues would question the validity of my facts regarding the nineteenth century here in America. This was especially disconcerting because it undermined what is so needed today, volunteerism and spiritual renewal. As you know, America must forgo its dependence on caretaking of the needy. All research demonstrates conclusively that it has failed, making those dependent on it lazy and un-American. Our cherished values of self-reliance, family integrity, religious worship, and the worship of capitalism have been eroded in favor of government subsidy, family disintegration, agnosticism, and desecration of capitalism's icons. When you have a rotten apple in the barrel, you have to get rid of the barrel. Experience teaches us this; we must not delude ourselves. That's why I went back to the halcyon days of the nineteenth century when people helped people. Olasky notes, as I said in the book, that there was one volunteer for every two poor people at that time. Now that's something to emulate! I know, you're going to remind me that Spahr's study, *An Essay on the Present Distribution of Wealth in the United States*, printed at that time, claimed that: "Of every 100 families one possessed more than the remaining 99 put together." But who should we believe? Is it more important for present day Americans to know that 5,500,000 families of the poorer classes had altogether \$800 million to share while 125,000 had \$33 billion? Or, is it more important for them to assume that this nation did not always depend on socialistic handouts, but could rely on charity? Do we want to give away our money to the shiftless who will not work, or do we want to encourage do-gooders to save our tax dollars by donating their time and energy to the have-nots? I mean, is there even a question here?

Let me reiterate what I stated so forcefully and, if I may be so humble, so eloquently in my book:

I wrote To Renew America because I believe that an aroused, informed, inspired American citizenry is the most powerful force on earth.

It was absolutely imperative to me that I accomplish this goal. If that meant making assertions that skirted the truth, overlooking events that would cloud the issues, eliminating facts that would contradict that goal because they might question the integrity of American heroes or belie the beautiful statements of our precious Constitution or Bill of Rights, then so be it. If our educational system has failed so miserably to educate our children over all these years, then why not take advantage of that reality by creating the America we wish had existed, and reeducate our people so

they can be proud, aroused, and inspired? Are there historians who would criticize this approach '? On what grounds '? How does this differ from deconstructionism '? Have I not a right to understand events from a personal perspective'? Is not this what every historian in fact does'? True, some rely on documents, testimonials, and external objective authorities to substantiate what they assert, but all of those "records" rely on someone's judgment. Someone selects, decides, and comments - always from his personal perspective! Why then castigate me'?

Gentlemen, colleagues, let me thank you in advance for reviewing this letter. I am most happy that we have arrived at a mutually acceptable accommodation of the issues presented in *To Renew America*. I had fear that I might be ostracized from your learned society because of the critical and callous objections to the work raised by other members of the Association. It is comforting to know that the administration of the Association comprehends the sensitive nature of a public diatribe about a book of this sort, written by a person of international stature, possessing as he does an advanced degree in your discipline. We would not want the rabble to witness the infighting among professionals casting into question the validity of anything we might assert. Should we allow this sort of thing, we could cripple the opportunity for others in our profession to make a considerable profit from his or her observations on our republic. If we maintain civility, give credence to our brothers even where we find it questionable, uphold the right of our learned colleagues to assert their beliefs, and protect our profession, then all of us will benefit.

I look forward to our continued association and to your continued support.

Sincerely,
y,

N
e
w
t

P.S. It occurred to me as I was completing this letter (following a luncheon I had today with the Director of the National Endowment for the Arts), that disbursements to our national learned associations were proceeding in a timely fashion. While some animosity attends deliberations in Congress on the amount of funding that should go to the values espoused by members, I assured him that the American Historical Association deserves not only continued funding, but that an increase in funding might help to improve NEA's somewhat tarnished image. You can be assured that I will be contacting you about this matter as soon as I hear from you regarding my letter.

© Copyright William A. Cook. All rights reserved.

