


My turn
Guest column



Southerners left a legacy of courage

By GARY B. ADAMS

I have long been what is called a "Civil War buff" or armchair historian, a breed of persons who spend as much time studying history as they do portraying and preserving it. My most enjoyable hobby is attending Civil War re-enactments.

The question I am asked most often, especially by the new crop of Yankee invaders and the younger generation, is why do we do it? They believe we are propagating a racist view and a way of life and belief that is out of touch in today's society.

I only hope I can put into words what I and others feel so important as to spend our lives trying to preserve it. Why, throughout our history, do the South's blacks and whites feel they are unique? I believe it is because of their heritage, their commitment to duty, their record for volunteering, but most of all their all-consuming love for their homes, families and God. The Southerner has long resented central authority; evidenced by Bacon's Rebellion of the 17th century and later the American Revolution. Those same beliefs were reflected in the Articles of Confederation and ultimately the Bill of Rights.

Winston Churchill once stated, "People who have contempt for their heritage have lost faith in themselves, and no nation can long survive without pride in its traditions." I wonder, due to dissent from various groups and complacency on the part of society, if this country is going to let the most dramatic event in our history slip through its fingers.

The reason why I feel so strongly towards the Confederate soldier, support flying of the flag, want recognition for Southern heroes and their deeds are simple: I respect the trials and tribulations those soldiers went through.

They left a legacy of devotion to duty, self-sacrifice and courage in the face of unbelievable adversity. Statistics show that the typical Southern soldier was a Protestant farmer, between 18 and 20 years old, had a limited education, possessed a great sense of justice and immense pride. He was a man of the land, raised to give life not to take life.


What bought Johnny Reb to war, to turn over his plowshare and take up his musket — HATE? I do not think so. I believe it was LOVE! Love of his family, freedom, homeland, but most of all his belief in God. Those beliefs resulted in an unequalled devotion to duty.

How could anyone say that those soldiers who faced so many hardships for so many years, to include making the ultimate sacrifice — the laying down of their lives — fought to perpetuate slavery? Only 10 percent of the Southerners owned slaves. Therefore out of the 750,000 men who fought for the South approximately 7,500 owned slaves.

Robert E. Lee said, "All that the South has ever desired was that the Union — as established by our forefathers — should be preserved and that the government — as originally organized — should be administered in purity and truth." Historians recognize that even if there had not been a slavery issue there would still have been a war. Historians also agree that even if the war had not been fought that changing attitudes and beliefs would have ensured an end to slavery.

Songwriter Bobby Horton penned this song which in a few words sums up my feelings: "There is a birthright that each Southern boy inherits when he is born, and he carries it forever until the day his mourners mourn. It's not found in old politics, nor race or slavery, and those who see no more than that care not for history."

Adams, 42, has made numerous TV appearances, speaking engagements, and is one of the subjects in a book entitled "Forgotten Warriors" at the War Memorial Museum in Newport News.



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