



Slaves and the National Anthem & other notable comments

Seth Mandel

September, 17 2017

Libertarian: In Defense of ‘The Star-Spangled Banner’

A statue honoring Francis Scott Key, author of “The Star-Spangled Banner,” was vandalized last week in Baltimore, apparently because of the perception that the national anthem is racist for using the following line in the rarely sung third verse: “No refuge could save the hireling and slave.” Some believe it’s a reference to freed slaves fighting for the British against America in the War of 1812, the subject and setting of the song. Not so fast, argues Walter Olson at National Review: In Key’s time, the word slave “had long functioned in English as a wide-ranging epithet, hurled at persons of any and all colors, nationalities, and conditions of servitude or otherwise.” Key never explained who he was referring to, Olson notes — and: “When we decide whether to give his words a reading that is charitable or otherwise, we make a choice too.”

Philosophy prof: Knowing Which Statues To Take Down

How do we know what statues and works of art to remove from public display due to insufficient sensitivity toward the issue of slavery? At CNN.com, Columbia professor John McWhorter offers three criteria. First, “Was the person’s or cultural artifact’s historical impact exclusively focused on slavery and racism?” Robert E. Lee’s was, but that wouldn’t apply to “Gone With the Wind,” McWhorter avers. Second, “Did the person insist on their support of segregation and racism even in the face of vigorous arguments otherwise?” George Washington and Thomas Jefferson wouldn’t meet this one; John C. Calhoun would. Third, “Is the monument an ever-present part of experience?” Statues and flags (like the Confederate flag), yes. But films, like “Gone With the Wind,” simply can’t be.

Campaign watcher: Trump, Immigration & the Midterms

President Trump “has thrown out the conventional political playbook less than a year into his presidency” by compromising on an issue as important to his base as illegal immigration, writes Josh Kraushaar at National Journal. That has implications for the midterms: “If Republicans cave on immigration, they’ll have absolutely nothing to show the populist base. And without legislative accomplishments on health care and tax reform . . . there’s nothing for more traditional conservatives to celebrate.” That could dampen GOP turnout in 2018. But turnout is less of a challenge in presidential elections, and many GOPers are likely to fall back in line by then anyway: “Indeed, Trump may have unwittingly figured out a way to break the gridlock in Washington: Take on his party’s obstructionist wing, and watch them meekly follow in line.”

Ex-CIA officer: The Voluntary-Censorship Crisis

Since Facebook hired thousands of “censors” in May, claims Philip Giraldi at The American Conservative, it has sabotaged articles deemed politically incorrect by suspending users’ ability to share them. Google engages in this gatekeeping as well. Giraldi says it’s hypocritical for those who complain about anonymous “fake news”-sharing accounts to be silent or supportive about this. “Far more dangerous than speculation about what the Russians might have done (or what the US government is doing) is the self-censorship being engaged in by the actual service providers and related media sites representing large and wealthy American corporations, some of which have near monopolistic power.” If such large-scale censorship continues, he writes, “the information revolution promised by the internet might well turn out to be a bad bargain.”

Asia expert: Understanding Suu Kyi’s Silence

Why isn’t Aung San Suu Kyi, the pro-democracy activist who is now Burma’s de facto leader, stepping in to defend the rights of the Muslim Rohingya minority suffering an ethnic cleansing in part of Burma? In The Washington Post, Joshua Kurlantzick explains that, for one reason, Suu Kyi has never shown real sympathy for the Rohingya, even tacitly denying their Burmese identity. For another, Suu Kyi believes the country’s economy and its ongoing peace talks with various militant groups are far more important uses of her time. Also, she’s stubborn, so she instinctively pushes back against foreign pressure. Nonetheless, says Kurlantzick: “Given her moral stature, her history and her power in Burma, Suu Kyi’s inaction has surely worsened affairs.”