



“Reading Our Country”
Sermon by Eric Liu • Civic Saturday
Hillman City Collaboratory • Seattle, WA • August 4, 2018

It’s Seafair weekend, which I liken to an intra-season solstice here in Seattle: the point of peak ripeness of that sensation of summer. For me, that sensation has always been bound up in books. Books in sunshine. When my daughter Olivia was six and seven, we would go to the downtown Central Library at the start of summer, receive a blank form for the Summer Reading Challenge, and check out a stack of *Goosebumps* books. And in the ensuing weeks she would joyfully fill in the lines of the form with the titles of the texts that she’d devoured while sitting in the yard, laying in our tent, or spread out on the couch. If you read ten books you’d get a certificate and maybe a T-shirt. I don’t remember what the reward was exactly because it wasn’t the point.

The point was that Olivia, now nineteen, is a voracious reader to this day.

On this midsummer’s morning, I’d like to reflect on what it means to read like a citizen. To decode, to make sense, to cohere patterns from chaos. To read, in short, is to know how to live among others. It is to know ourselves and our nation. It’s why in a great city public life is dense with reading and readers: at bus stops, on the trolleys, in the cafes.

Harry Truman said, “Not all readers are leaders but all leaders are readers.” Truman’s line rings deeply true. A love of reading is central to deep citizenship. Reading novels. Reading histories. Reading plays. Reading poems. These habits, in turn, make us better at reading people. Reading situations. Reading trends. Reading trouble. Virginia Woolf put it this way: “One has only to read, to look, to listen, to remember.”

The ambiguity of this single line of text is arrestingly beautiful. Let me say it again: “One has only to read, to look, to listen, to remember.”

Does she mean that one needs to read, look, and listen *in order* to remember? Or is she saying that to read, look, listen, and remember – to do these four discrete things – is sufficient for a happy life? The text, like that of the Second Amendment or the phrase “all men are created equal,” is forever open to interpretation.

I usually have several books open on my nightstand or on our coffee table or on the end table. I like having those texts interweave in my waking and sleeping imagination. I love connecting dots from one to another, between memory and aspiration. And so today I want to share with you some ideas, images, emotions, and interpretations that four books have stirred in me during this summer of reading and sense-making.

1.

Right around Memorial Day I finally saw *Hidden Figures*, the film about three African American women mathematicians who were the unsung heroes of America's early space program. Their complex calculations made it possible for the rocket launches of the Mercury missions to succeed. It was the age before supercomputers – and before racial integration had become a norm, which is what makes this a double overcoming-the-odds story. The movie was as neatly inspiring as I expected it to be.

When I saw *Hidden Figures*, the novelist and journalist Tom Wolfe had recently died, so I decided to re-read his classic book about the space program called *The Right Stuff*. That book, in Wolfe's distinctive hyperkinetic prose, describes how the first American astronauts arose from the 1950s culture of military fighter pilots. They were daring young Americans who, as JFK put it in his Inaugural Address, were "tempered by war, disciplined by a hard and bitter peace." Men of the new generation to whom the torch had been passed, like Chuck Yeager of West Virginia and the Air Force, the first human to break the sound barrier, and John Glenn of Ohio and the Marine Corps, the first American to orbit the earth. That culture was all about "pushing the envelope" a term coined by the pilots who were testing the limits their experimental aircraft. It was a culture bound up with the sparkly optimism of Kennedy's New Frontier and the existential anxiety of the Cold War. Fundamentally, it was about living fast: in Wolfe's capitalized mantra, "Flying & Drinking and Drinking & Driving."

The Blue Angels of the U.S. Navy roaring overhead this weekend in F-18s are also daring fighter jocks who are ice-cold under pressure – but over the generations the homespun roughness of test pilot culture has been polished away. Here's my favorite story from *The Right Stuff*. Two nights before Chuck Yeager was to attempt the first supersonic flight, he and his fellow pilots and his wife Glennis were at the bar near the airfield, and after many beers he and Glennis decided to get on a couple of horses and race each other through the Joshua trees in the moonlit desert. Yeager never saw the gate that catapulted him at full speed; when he got up, his right side hurt like hell. He'd broken a couple of ribs. He soon realized there was no way he'd be able to use his right arm to close the cockpit door of his X-1 rocket plane. But there was also no way he was going to tell his commanders or beg out of the flight. So, he confided in another pilot, Jack Ridley, an Oklahoma-born engineer who sawed nine inches off the end of a broomstick and made a lever that Yeager could use with his *left* hand to turn the handle that would secure the door. The next morning, Chuck Yeager broke the sound barrier.

That's a story about American ingenuity. It's a story about having the right stuff: a willingness to take great risks – even reckless risks – on frontiers old and new. It is a story about American character. But what *is* American character? Shall we measure it by the acts of heroes or of everyday people? By the worst among us or by the best? By patterns over time or by signature moments? By the traits of the long-dominant group or of the long-subordinated?

Those African American female mathematicians working in the basement also had the right stuff but until their story was told the American people didn't know it. Didn't know they had lived, didn't know their names: Katherine Johnson of West Virginia, Dorothy Vaughan of Missouri, Mary Jackson of Virginia. American character, in the end, is a *fable*, told by some to stand for all: a narrative that may have basis in fact but is not historical so much as aspirational. That's what *Hidden Figures* was too: based on a true story, but tidied up, with only a nod to the messiness of the world and to the unhappy beginnings and endings that existed in real life outside the frame of the film. It exists as legend. A tale we like to tell about ourselves.

Tom Wolfe's often manic prose can mislead a reader into thinking he was a booster, a true believer in the frenzied patriotism that he chronicles and a full participant in the primal mass yearning in 1959 and '60 and '61 to make heroes of those astronauts because they were willing to race the godless Soviets and sit on top of exploding rockets and die for our glory and so when they came back alive they needed to be turned into *gods*. But read *The Right Stuff* closely and you realize Wolfe is questioning that worshipful exuberance, revealing its manic brittleness; he is, in exaggerating the great American narrative about the rugged individualist cowboy flyboy American hero, asking whether we doth protest too much. Whether we are nervous conformists at heart. Whether we are more scared and empty and godless than we want to admit.

And when he talks about how the third and seventh and tenth missions to space became routine and the public grew bored, and the long-suffering wives of those flyboys and spacemen felt cheated out of the parades and adulation that had been part of the social contract of being the wife of an astronaut, Wolfe is describing a coming back to earth: a routinization of the thrill, yes, but also a reminder that it is impossible to sustain a fever pitch of anything for too long – and that myths, even necessary myths, will lose their force if you stare at them too long.

2.

Which brings me to the second book of my summer. It's called *The Death of Democracy*, by Benjamin Carter Hett, and it's an absorbing and alarming history of Germany's Weimar Republic and the rise of Adolf Hitler.

I've long known the outlines of this period between the world wars: the way the German people resented having to pay reparations; the hyperinflation and constant economic upheavals long before the Great Depression; the exploitation of democratic institutions by demagogues; the iron partisanship that became weaponized and violent; the fateful miscalculations by establishment right-wing leaders who thought they could control Hitler by bringing him to power. Do you get now why I'm alarmed?

But until reading this book I did not appreciate the degree to which two myths, about August and November, had shaped the politics of Weimar Germany. The first myth said that in August 1914 the nation was unified and joyful as it went to war. Everybody's memories of that time were as warm and sun-dappled as the month itself. The reality, though, was that the nation was divided; there were as many demonstrations against the war as for it. The other myth said that in gray cold November 1919, the nation was betrayed by liberal politicians who ended the war too soon.

Both myths were made possible by the fact that the fighting in World War I never touched German soil. And because Germans were fed a steady diet of fake news that stoked the passions of August, most were shocked when the November armistice came five years later. How could it be that Germany had given up: their armies were on the move! How could its politicians accept such humiliating terms? Yes, many young men had died – there was no denying it – but not a single shell had landed on the fatherland.

There was only one way for millions of Germans to close this gap of cognitive dissonance and that was to buy into the myth of the “stab in the back”: a nationalist narrative that said the generals were doing their jobs and the war was still winnable except that left-wing politicians and Jews had conspired to deny the army its final chance and had betrayed the nation at Versailles in November 1919.

Perhaps the most powerful exponent of the “stab in the back” lie was Field Marshal Paul von Hindenburg, the supreme commander who had not been able to prevail in the fields of France but who was unwilling to take responsibility for his failure or for the truce that he knew was Germany's only way out. He kept his distance from the armistice signing, and when he returned from the war all he did was cast blame and legitimate the stab-in-the-back conspiracy theories that fueled right-wing revanchism.

That's enough to put the man in the Hall of Infamy. But he wasn't done. Later, as a still-revered military man, Hindenburg was elected President. He hastened the death of democracy by collaborating with one right-wing nationalist politician after another to gut the Constitution in the name of staving off Communism. The proud Prussian general was always scornful of Hitler, whom he called “the Bohemian private.” But as the Nazi Party reached critical mass during the depths of the Depression, Hindenburg chose to make Hitler chancellor, thinking that he could control him, rather than form an anti-fascist coalition with parties of the left and center. The rest, as they say, is history.

The United States today is not Weimar-era Germany. But moral cowardice is timeless. And so is the desire to believe in stories where you are both the victim and the hero. Millions of white Americans today cannot abide a reality in which they think they are losing relative power and privilege. They will not consider the possibility of coalition with long-disfavored minorities. They see life as zero-sum. They don't believe that we are all better off when we're all better off. So they nurse two myths, akin to the myths of August and November. The first myth says America was greatest when whites dominated. The second says we can keep it that way forever.

You can't blame Donald Trump for exploiting these anxieties any more than you can blame a virus for infecting the body. You *can* blame every Republican elected leader who knows better and stays silent or, worse, pulls a Hindenburg and calculates that this demagoguery and degradation of our institutions is worth a corporate tax cut and a Supreme Court pick or two. And you *can* blame every Democrat who would rather resist than persuade, who cannot explain to someone who feels otherwise that life is more than zero-sum and that we *can* be better together.

And that's something else this book has reminded me: the desire to be both the victim and the hero of one's own story is as strong on the left as it is on the right.

That was true a hundred years ago in Germany and it is true today in the United States. It is true in over-righteous Seattle. One cautionary lesson of the Weimar years is how factional divisions – in that case, between reactionary Protestants and centrist Catholics, between nationalists and democrats, capitalists and communists – made for a dehumanized politics in which *everyone* evaded responsibility for the good of the realm. Compromise evaporated. Everyone weaponized identity and the winners killed the losers. The socialists and the conservative nationalists had their own militia-gangs like the Nazi SS. But because the winners killed the losers, today we know only the SS.

Winners killing losers. Some might say that's life. Or that's politics. Maybe. But it wasn't supposed to be the American way. Or maybe it was always the American way it but it wasn't supposed to be the American story. Either way, for better and for worse, no matter who kills whom, nothing is ever truly dead. Germany's Chancellor today, Angela Merkel, put it chillingly well in a recent interview: "When the generation that survived the war is no longer with us," she said, "we'll find out whether we have learned from history." We are always two or three generations away from repeating our catastrophes.

You and I gathered together on this August morning, looking to Novembers past and yet to come, must take on the doubly against-the-odds task of fighting those who want to undermine democratic institutions while also checking our own tendencies to become that which we fight. That is why we are here. To do what may be impossible. To keep each other honest about our hypocrisies.

What could be more American?

3.

I said nothing is ever dead *for better and for worse*. A body falls, it becomes grass, it feeds another. Was it a villain's body or a hero's body? It is grass. Is the one who now feeds aware of the chains of sin and saintliness that soak the soil? It is grass.

The thought is Whitmanesque. But the third book I want to tell you about is a slender volume of poetry not by Walt Whitman but by the contemporary Native American poet Layli Long Soldier. It is called *Whereas*. It opens with these lines:

Now
make room in the mouth
for grassesgrassesgrasses

It is composed in two parts – “These Being the Concerns,” and “Whereas” – a structure that echoes the litany of wrongs that opens the Declaration of Independence and the concise statement of resolution that closes it. But the text Long Soldier is riffing off is not the Declaration of Independence. It is the Congressional Resolution of Apology to Native Americans, S.J. Res. 14, of the 111th Congress.

I confess I had not heard of this resolution. That's perhaps unsurprising, since it passed in December 2009 as an amendment to a massive defense appropriations bill and was signed by President Obama in January 2010 with no fanfare or ceremony. It includes some blunt language about the wrongs done to Native Peoples and “the breaking of covenants.” It apologizes for “many instances of violence, mistreatment, and neglect.” It expresses regret “for the ramifications of former wrongs.” But it closes with a disclaimer that says, “Nothing in this Resolution 1) authorizes or supports any claim against the United States; or 2) serves as a settlement of any claim against the United States.”

What eats at Layli Long Soldier is pretty much all of it. The sorry-not-sorry disclaimer. The disrespectful silence that surrounded the resolution's enactment. (If an apology is issued in a forest and nobody hears it, did it issue?). Her form-twisting, time-looping poems meditate in anger and in sorrow on the circuits of history and the way that history – even history we are not aware of – enters the body. In the habits of her daughter who tries not to cry, tries in fact to smile, when her knees are skinned and bleeding. In the habits of accepting and rejecting, simultaneously hating and needing, the boxes of language that the people and government of the United States have long placed Native Americans into: treaties, resolutions, reservations, coffins. She resolves to reject this so-called apology and its caveats. To declare herself.

The poem we heard excerpted today, about the Dakota 38, closes with these lines:

Sometimes, if in a circle, if I wish to exit, I must leap.
And let the body swing.
From the platform
Out.
To the grasses.

As it happens, the day I read these poems I was in Aspen, Colorado and in the bathroom of the Western chic log-cabin mansion I was visiting, was a 1948 photograph of the remaining American Indian survivors of the Battle of Little Big Horn. Eight aging men, dressed in full feather, sitting and crouching in a field of grass.

I stood staring at this photograph, taken less than a year after Chuck Yeager flew faster than sound, and I had to wonder. What if the Native Americans had won? What if in the lavish homes of modern-day Pueblo or Plains Indians, the restrooms were adorned with collectors' item photos of white warriors who had fallen during Little Big Horn or, better yet, had survived to live out their years as traveling curiosities and kitschy icons? How would white people today feel about that?

Then I started thinking: what if Union veterans who returned home from the Civil War to build their lives and their fortunes decided to adorn their parlors and powder rooms with images of the white Confederate soldiers they'd defeated? Why didn't they? Why didn't they make those brave fallen adversaries into good-luck totems or symbols of a self-congratulatory tolerance?

Oh right – because they were white. They were brothers, to be reunited after the war. The enemies became once again “us,” and the people formerly enslaved by those enemies became once again “them.”

And this is the topic of the fourth and final book I want to share with you.

4.

This book is a recent play by Suzan Lori-Parks. It is called *Father Comes Home from the Wars, Parts 1, 2 & 3*. Everything about the title is deliberately Civil War-era clunky. The rapid cadence and jagged syntax of the dialogue is at once Victorian, jazzy, and something else more distant that you can't quite identify until you realize – wait, the main character is named Hero, his rival is Homer, the woman he leaves behind is Penny, his cross-eyed dog is Odd-see. This is the *Odyssey*.

The play is about a loyal and honest slave, Hero, who decides to leave his wife Penny to be by the side of his master, a Colonel in the Confederate Army. Colonel has promised Hero his freedom for his service. During the war, Colonel and Hero get lost in the woods. Along the way they capture a wounded Union officer named Smith. The

three of them hear an approaching army and they wait, as if for Godot. Smith, it turns out, is a light-skinned black soldier in the Colored Regiment passing for a white officer. He wears the coat of his dead captain on top of his own private's coat. When Colonel steps away, Smith shares his secret with Hero and offers him one of his coats so they can flee together to the Union army. Hero frees Smith but chooses not to join him. Later, after Colonel dies in battle, Hero returns to the farm. He has renamed himself Ulysses. The remaining slaves are preparing to run away. Ulysses stays. And he forgets to mention a piece of paper folded in his pocket: a proclamation of emancipation.

Who is us? Who is them? What does it mean to change coats? Who is empowered to liberate whom? Should we be loyal to people or to ideas? And if to people, to people now before us or to people in our memories? Who gets to call this act fidelity to the nation and that act betrayal? And who is truly ready to handle the burdens of freedom?

I had my answers to these questions, and *Father Comes Home from the Wars* made me rethink every one of my answers.

This is a play every American should read. I mean read. I would love to see it performed. In the original production in 2014, at the Public Theater in New York, Sterling K. Brown, now of *This Is Us* and *Black Panther* fame, played Hero. *That* I would have loved to have seen. But to read this work is to appreciate the genius of its devices. One device Parks invents is a distinction between a rest and a spell. A rest is a breath, a pause for transition. A spell is "elongated and heightened," as she puts it in her author's note. It's signified by a stacking of characters' names with no dialogue:

Homer
Hero
Homer
Hero

That stacking signifies a pregnant silence between the characters, to be staged at the director's discretion. When I read the play and saw where Parks chose to use this device, I imagined the actors freezing, their eyes locked in deep unspoken emotion. Casting a spell on each other and the audience.

This three-part play, this triptych tale of losing oneself while finding one's way home, is a story that's in our bones. It's older than Homer and as fresh as this morning. We reenact it every time we migrate. Every time we reinvent ourselves. Every time we amputate the appendages of inconvenient memory, only to learn that the phantom limb haunts us more. A play like this can make North act as if it were South, Asian as if black or white, born here as if brought here, free to go as if free to stay. A play like this is a garden of empathy. But not moral relativism: you don't come to see the Colonel's praise song to whiteness as morally praiseworthy. You do come to realize what a man like that thinks he has to lose. And that is helpful in the United States today.

I don't know how many of you still indulge in this Civil War-era habit called "reading a newspaper" but the other day I was indulging at my kitchen table with the New York Times. Actually, I was procrastinating on this sermon. You could tell I was procrastinating because I had gotten to the Thursday Styles section and was still reading. Lo and behold, with a half-page photograph of soldiers in blue and gray, was a long article about Civil War re-enactors. It was called "Fading Into History."

Re-enactments happen at famous battlefields like Gettysburg and Manassas. Middle-aged men, mainly white and mainly conservative, don Union and Confederate uniforms and camp out using only period implements and firearms and food and then in the searing heat pretend to kill each other by the tens of thousands. Or at least it used to be tens of thousands. The problem is that turnout for re-enactments has been on a steady decline for decades. Now only a few thousand show up to participate or watch.

Why? Well, as with so many collective experiences, the younger generation isn't into it. So the participants are aging and getting hurt and getting heat stroke and deciding to return home from the wars and hang it up. But it's more than that. Re-enactment has come to seem increasingly out of step with today's moral and political climate because while it is about re-creating battles it is also about not taking sides.

Civil War re-enactment grows out of a culture that honors the dead on both sides. That says there were fine people on both sides and worthy causes all around. Innocence everywhere, guilt nowhere. Re-enactment is about fidelity to the finest detail – the Confederate battle flag, the insignia, the precise times and locations of cavalry charges – fidelity to everything except *why* the Civil War was fought.

And in the age of Black Lives Matter and torchlight parades in Charlottesville and kneeling NFL players and still-standing Confederate monuments, the why of the Civil War and the why of Reconstruction and the Civil Rights Movement cannot be avoided, and certainly not to provide for the emotional comfort of a group of Civil War re-enactors. The *why* of the war is the *why* of why we say all persons are created equal.

But does that mean we should demonize and stereotype the people who are afraid to go there, whose identity as re-enactors is bound up in a myth of innocence? What good will that do? They are human characters, each with motivations and self-stories as complicated and contradictory as those of Hero and Ulysses, who were the same man after all, or of Smith the white captain and Smith the black private, one man in two coats. In this year's Gettysburg reenactment there was a group of younger African American men who came dressed as members of a black Union unit. As professional actors like to ask: What's their motivation? We can find out best by asking.

If we must argue, let's argue to understand rather than to win. Understanding is real and lasting; winning is illusory and temporary. I don't know how many of you still indulge in

this modern habit called “going on Twitter” but if you spend a few minutes on any trending political topic on you realize we are all arguing to win instead of to understand. In the process, we are all enacting a Second Civil War into existence.

But remember: we are not actors. We must not be actors, blindly following someone else’s script. We are authors of *this* play. This play does not have an ending. It almost certainly won’t unfold in a triptych or in a four-part sermon or in a hip-hop libretto. Because it is not the kind of art that’s made after the event. It is the kind of art that’s made *out of* events. In short, it is citizenship in a democracy. It is participation in a complex adaptive system influenced by some more than others but controlled by no one and moveable by anyone. It is the quantum unpredictability of life itself. That’s the scary and urgent thing about the Weimar Republic: there were people then as committed to liberal democracy as we are now.

Do we have the right stuff to save our Union? People love quoting Martin Luther King on how “the moral arc of the universe is long but it bends toward justice.” Yet they often forget the arc doesn’t self-bend; it is *bent*. And they forget the words of John Maynard Keynes, who said, “In the long run, we’re all dead.” Here we are now, the living, called to read and write our nation back into existence – and this time, into an existence that is not premised on male domination or on white supremacy or on stealing the labor and land of the nonwhite or on a failure to apologize that curdles into shame and blame.

If you have had a hand in our troubles – and you have, as have I – then don’t be like Paul von Hindenburg. Don’t shirk responsibility and scapegoat others. Own your piece of it. If you have any modicum of privilege – and since you are here, you do – then don’t be like the Congress and President Obama in 2010. Don’t be afraid of who you might lose when you try to set things right. Just set things right.

We must fight for Union: a union based not on avoiding our divisions but reckoning with them. We must fight for civic love: love that judges *and* forgives. We must bring this fight home now. We, you and I and Suzan Lori-Parks and Layli Long Soldier, we all get to decide the matter right alongside Mitch McConnell and Roseanne Barr and Sean Hannity. We get to reconstruct the script by including new characters and new lines as the play unfolds. Or by reading the old lines with new feeling. We get to commit to each other to do that. We’ve got to, from Crown Hill to Hillman City, from this Washington to the other one, from sea to shining sea.

Look at one another for a spell. Read each other’s eyes and through them, see what our country can be.

Readings to Precede the Sermon
August 4, 2018

Tom Wolfe
From *The Right Stuff*
Published 1979

It was as if the press in America, for all its vaunted independence, were a great colonial animal, an animal made up of countless clustered organisms responding to a single nervous system. In the late 1950s (as in the late 1970s) the animal seemed determined that in all matters of national importance the *proper emotion*, the *seemly sentiment*, the *fitting moral tone* should be established and should prevail; and all information that muddied the tone and weakened the feeling should simply be thrown down the memory hole. In a later period this impulse of the animal would take the form of blazing indignation about corruption, abuses of power, and even minor ethical lapses, among public officials; here, in April of 1959, it took the form of a blazing patriotic passion for the seven test pilots who had volunteered to go into space. In either case, the animal's fundamental concern remained the same: the public, the populace, the citizenry, must be provided with *the correct feelings!* One might regard this animal as the consummate hypocritical Victorian gent. Sentiments that one scarcely gives a second thought to in one's private life are nevertheless insisted upon in all public utterances.

Layli Long Soldier
"38"
From *Whereas* (a collection of poems)
Published 2017

You may or may not have heard about the Dakota 38.

If this is the first time you've heard of it, you might wonder, "What is the Dakota 38?"

The Dakota 38 refers to thirty-eight Dakota men who were executed by hanging, under orders from President Abraham Lincoln.

To date, this is the largest "legal" mass execution in US history.

The hanging took place on December 26, 1862 – the day after Christmas.

This was the *same week* that President Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation.

In the preceding sentence, I italicize “same week” for emphasis.

There was a movie titled *Lincoln* about the presidency of Abraham Lincoln.

The signing of the Emancipation Proclamation was included in the film *Lincoln*; the hanging of the Dakota 28 was not.

In any case, you might be asking, “Why were thirty-eight Dakota men hung?”

As a side note, the past tense of hang is *hung*, but when referring to the capital punishment of hanging, the correct past tense is *hanged*.

So it’s possible that you’re asking, “Why were thirty-eight Dakota men hanged?”

They were hanged for the Sioux Uprising.

I want to tell you about the Sioux Uprising, but I don’t know where to begin.

....

When the Dakota people were starving, as you may remember, government traders would not extend store credit to “Indians.”

One trader named Andrew Myrick is famous for his refusal to provide credit to Dakota people by saying, “If they are hungry, let them eat grass.”

There are variations of Myrick’s words, but they are all something to that effect.

When settlers and traders were killed during the Sioux Uprising, one of the first to be executed by the Dakota was Andrew Myrick.

When Myrick’s body was found,

his mouth was stuffed with grass.

I am inclined to call this act by the Dakota warriors a poem.

There’s irony in their poem.

There was no text.

Suzan Lori-Parks

From *Father Comes Home from the Wars: Parts 1, 2 & 3* (a play)

Published 2015

COLONEL:

I am grateful every day that God made me white. As a white I stand on the summit and all the other colors reside beneath me, down below. For me, no matter how much money I've got or don't got, if my farm is failing or my horse is dead, if my woman is sour or my child has passed on, I can at least rest in the grace that God made me white. And I don't ever have to fight the Battle of Darkness. What difficulties I may encounter will at least never be those. Life might bring me low but not that low. And I know that I will be received in most any quarter. And if the Lord should choose to further advance my economics, then I will be received in all the great houses. Not so with the lower ones. The lower ones will always be lowly. No matter how high they climb. There is a kind of comfort in that. And I take that comfort. For no matter how low I fall, and no matter how thoroughly I fail, I will always be white.