

Are We Trying to Fix America's Past or Her Future?

by Jenny L. Cote



When something breaks, our first inclination is to determine if it is worth fixing. If not, we throw it out. If so, we do whatever is required to fix it. Things of truly priceless worth—like people and countries—must be fixed with time and other forms of payment, like patience, perseverance, sacrifice and blood.

There is a lot of talk right now about erasing America's history—the history that hurts us to think about and that we wish we didn't have. Do you ever wish you could do that with your personal history and things you'd rather forget? Try as we might, we can't erase our past. But if I study my personal history closely, those ugly blights in my past are the very ones that turned my young foolishness into wisdom. Those are the moments I "grew up." I submit that the hardest lessons we learn are the ones we most remember, for they taught us

something valuable. They taught us to never make the same mistakes again.

America has a past, one with a lot of mistakes we shouldn't celebrate, but instead learn from to improve our future. Any effort to erase her historical past doesn't fix her. Rather, it causes her to be weighed down by guilt and regret, carrying it around to the point that she is paralyzed and polarized, unable to take a step forward.

Our personal histories can also leave us carrying around a heavy burden of guilt and regret. I discovered a way out of my broken past through the grace and forgiveness of God. About a hundred years ago, Oswald Chambers penned these words: *"God is the God of our yesterdays, and He allows the memory of them to turn past events into a ministry of spiritual growth for our future...Our yesterdays hold broken and irreversible things for us...Leave the broken, irreversible past in His hands, and step out into the invincible future with Him."*

I can't fix my past. You can't fix your past. But neither of our broken personal histories are worth throwing away. As God's children we are of priceless worth regardless of our brokenness. We're worth saving. We can't fix our past, but we can use our broken past to fix our collective future.

Might I suggest that we do with America's past what we do for our own personal histories? We must know what she did and where she went wrong in order to gain wisdom from the foolish choices of her youth. We must help America grow up, not tear her down.

As one commentator [wrote about the removal of Confederate statues in 2017](#), “When you find yourself at a crime scene, you don’t destroy evidence. You preserve it for the prosecution.” Attempting to tear down statues and monuments does a disservice to America’s future. Of course we shouldn’t celebrate the oppression connected to some immortalized leaders, but we must know and learn about them to remind us of what is wrong and what is right in our complex history.

You and I are America’s present. I believe we each are called to do something as individuals to fix her future with our individual gifts and abilities. It took me a while to figure it out, but coupled with my passions and giftings, I know that I can research and I can tell stories, so I’ve chosen to do my part in fixing America’s future by telling her story—the good, the bad and the ugly of it all. And I’m telling America’s story for the next generation, for they are her future. I don’t wish to burden our children with the weight of new mistakes for them to carry on their shoulders. I want them to learn from our mistakes and fix America’s future, and I believe they can only learn if they are taught our history.

Former civil rights activist Bob Woodson, Sr. said, “Slavery is America’s birth defect.” The Woodson Center recently launched their [1776 United Campaign](#), designed to “uphold our country’s authentic founding virtues and values and challenge those who assert America is forever defined by its past failures, such as slavery. . . Our focus is on solving problems.” They are fixing America’s future.

Consider that the Declaration of Independence and our Constitution were broken from the very beginning because they were created by broken humans seeking to change a broken system. The liberty the founding fathers espoused was not extended to every man, woman and child at the outset, but that was the plan for the future. So did we throw out our founding documents as worthless? No, America's birth certificate and governing roadmap were worth saving and fixing, so we've amended them across time. And as America continues to grow up, we'll keep doing so in order to fix the future.

Your history and mine are worth keeping and worth learning from. So is America's. Let's learn from each other and *teach* our children America's past. That's how we'll fix our future.

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