

Community Comment
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A. Secular Government

This is the 25th anniversary of perhaps the best documentary film ever made. It just happened to cover the most significant event in the history of our nation. Some would argue the Revolution or the creation of the constitution, or the genius of the Declaration of Independence, or the victory of World War 2. I agree with those who argue for the civil War because it established two critical paths that we still follow today.

As much as we often don't like to talk about it, slavery and the many issues surrounding slavery was one root of the clash between brothers, and fathers and sons, neighbors and states, and morals and beliefs. During the construct of the new nation, we tiptoed around the slavery issue. Some historians think that if we had ended slavery then, the development of the country would have fallen apart. True or not, we will never know what may have happened. We do know that we successfully created a new and different form of government that worked then and is still working two hundred plus years later. We also know that we specifically used language like more perfect union and all men are created equal. We knew we wanted to be better and to do better.

What didn't happen immediately after the war was an instant end to discrimination, distrust, and bigotry. It took time for the black man to get the vote and even then there were serious roadblocks. Jobs were scarce and slaves started with next to nothing. They had no experience in taking care of themselves, most couldn't read or add or subtract, and they had never really been part of American Culture. It's an understatement of the highest order to say they had a tough road ahead of them. That many thought they were not as intelligent as whites didn't help. Watching the Ken Burns documentary points out way too many things that haven't changed much in 150 years.

The other path that was established was that we were and are a union of states, with a strong federal government. With this we are a nation; without it, we are not. We also re-established some key elements of this newly cemented nation. One of these was that we are a nation of laws and not men. This is critical in keeping corruption and class systems from forming. These laws are the ones that we create in order to self govern thru our representatives. This further established the fact that ours is a secular government. As more and more immigrants graced our shores and built this country, this allowed us to keep religious conflict to a minimum. We were governed collectively by our laws starting with the Constitution which allowed for the private choice of worship to be left to the individual apart from government.

It is especially disturbing to see an elected official not understand or obey the oath of office. The oath, the same one I took four times as an elected councilmember is an oath to obey, and protect and defend the Constitution of the United States. Not the Bible. Not the

old or new testaments. Not the Koran. Not Buddhist or Hindi teachings. An elected official runs for an office and should know what is expected of him or her. To not do that job is simply not an option. It violates what the Civil War established and what we do, and should, still cherish.

This has been Sam Pennisi for community comment.