

Oak Cliff Advocate White Washes John Henninger Reagan Elementary School

— Edward H. Sebesta 1/8/2018

In the January 2018 Oak Cliff edition of the *Advocate*, is an article titled, “The other idolized Reagan: One low-income school in Oak Cliff bears the name of a Confederate leader,” by *Advocate* editor Rachel Stone.

Of particular interest in the article is the following somewhat self-contradicting statement:

While imprisoned, he wrote a letter to his fellow Texans imploring them to recognize the authority of the United States, to renounce secession and slavery, and to extend the “elective franchise” to former slaves. If not, he warned, the U.S. would take military action against Texas, and black people would be given the vote.¹

So John H. Reagan urged giving black people the vote to avoid giving black people the vote? J.H. Reagan in his memoirs was very clear about his warning stating that he urged:

... that we should give ... give to the negroes the protection of the laws, and at least a qualified right to vote in elections. That by acceding to this we might avoid the establishment of military government and universal negro suffrage.

Reagan admonishes:

They refused to act, and thus involved the State in all the horrors of military government, universal negro suffrage, and the cruel measures of Reconstruction.²

Reagan repeatedly refers to African Americans voting as an oppression of the former Confederate states, as part of Reconstruction which is a “horror,” “horrid and unspeakable,” and a “cruel policy.”³

Reagan was Vice-President and member of the Committee on Resolutions of the Conservative State Convention of 1868 in Houston. These are the first three resolutions.

Resolved, 1. That the question of African supremacy arises far above all questions of party, and is vital to the future interests of this State; as subordinate to that, we cheerfully concur with all parties who are opposed to the Africanization of the State.

2. That believing it to be the determination of the Radical party to create a convention, and yet desiring to express our opposition to the Africanization of Texas, we recommend the people of the State entitled to register, to do so and to vote against a convention, and, to guard against the contingency of its being successfully carried, to vote at the same time for the election of delegates to the convention on the basis of creating a constitution without negro suffrage, and asking Congress to accept the same, believing that we should only be recognized as in the Union on a footing of equality with the other States, and that the Northern people will demand no more.

3. That the resolutions of the mass meeting of loyal Union citizens, assembled in this city on the 20th inst, submitted to us for consideration, meet the approval of this convention in their general spirit and desire to defeat the Africanization of this State, and to secure its restoration to civil government in the Union.⁴

In his 1906 biography he explains why he supported secession:

But when we were told that we must submit to the violation of the Constitution, the overthrow of the rights of the States and the destruction of three thousand million dollars worth of property in slaves,—property recognized by the Constitution, Federal and State laws, and by the decisions of the Supreme Court of the United States,—I could no longer agree to such a Union, and determined to join in any measure which might defeat it.⁵

He talks of “unreasoning fanaticism by the enemies of slavery,” who “would not discuss the question of race or its fitness and capacity for civilization and self-government.”⁶

In 1902 in a *Dallas Morning News* article Reagan gives a biblical defense of slavery in response to the “anti-slavery men had much to say about the sin and wickedness of slavery,” stating:

I may call attention to the fact of the existence of slaves and the slave trade among the ancient Israelites; a people under the immediate guidance of God; and to the repeated injunctions of the Christ our Savior to servants to obey their masters.⁷

Reagan, in a speech given at the dedication of the Confederate War Memorial in Dallas in 1897, regards as more glorious than the battles of the Civil War the restoration of white supremacy after the Civil War.⁸

“... The strife of the war is over, peace has been restored. It is true that in this restoration we had to pass through a period of reconstruction worse and more humiliating than war ---“

“But we have the fruits of peace, and it is one of the grandest things connected with the memory of that struggle and of what followed. Our country’s resources were exhausted, our property sacrificed, the bravest and best of our men slain upon the battle fields, denied the privileges of self-government, subjected to military power, **the attempt made to subject us to the control of a servile race**. With all of this, the highest compliment that could be paid our people seems to me, better than all the victories of battle, was that under such circumstances we were able to preserve the organization of society, to re-establish organized government, to restore the industries of the country and to establish constitutional laws which protect and vindicate the rights of a free people.” [Bold face added.]

The restoration of white supremacy, the overthrow of Reconstruction, the maraudings and terror of the Ku Klux Klan, Red Shirts, White League and the Knights of the White Camelia and just general violent white terrorism is according to John H. Reagan is “the highest compliment” that is “better than all the victories of battle” in the Civil War. These are just examples of Reagan’s racism. The fact that any school anywhere is named after J.H. Reagan is abhorrent. The reason the children at that school are “low-income” is because Reagan’s support of white supremacy and the overthrow of Reconstruction a legacy we grapple even unto this day.

What message does it send to African American school children about their worth?

Reagan’s racism is erased from Stone’s article and his stance on African Americans voting is not made clear, perhaps he could be interpreted as being more progressive on it than other white people at the time. Certainly you have no idea what an appalling racist Reagan was and how unacceptable it is to have a school named after him in reading this article.

This is what white nationalism is built upon. Everyday acts like this which preserve a white nationalist understanding of history and maintain a built environment of streets, monuments, schools, etc. to maintain a racialized white landscape.

Yes, there are fringe individuals which use racial slurs and explicitly express their racism. However, they are largely, if not entirely, not in positions of influence. The worst impact of these racists is that they provide a rationalization for many that they are not racist because they aren’t like these extreme racists.

Far more important are articles like Stone’s. I don’t want to entirely fault Stone on this article, perhaps being a non-historian she relied on the unfortunate Texas State Historical Association Handbook and the usual Civil War books and what is taught in the high schools.

W.E.B. DuBois wrote in “The Lie of History as It Is Taught Today,” in 1960:

Thus we train generations of men who do not know the past, or believe a false picture of the past, to have no trustworthy guide for living and to stumble doggedly on, through mistake after mistake, to fatal ends. Our history becomes "lies agreed upon" and stark ignorance guides our future.⁹

Yet it is 57 years later and we are still teaching a banal white nationalist history. When will this stop?

¹ Stone, Rachel, "The other idolized Reagan: One low-income school in Oak Cliff bears the name of a Confederate leader," *Advocate Oak Cliff*, Vol. 11 No. 1, Jan. 2018, pp. 30, illustration, photo portrait of John H. Reagan, pp. 31.

² Reagan, John H. Reagan, "Memoirs: With Special Reference to Secession and the Civil War," The Neale Publishing Co., New York, 1906, Pp. 240-41.

³ Reagan, John H. Reagan, "Memoirs: With Special Reference to Secession and the Civil War," The Neale Publishing Co., New York, 1906, examples, "horror," pp. 102, "cruel" pp. 237, "horrid" pp. 238.

⁴ Winkler, Ernest William, editor, "Platforms of Political Parties in Texas," in *Bulletin of the University of Texas*, 1916, No. 53, Sept. 20, 1916, pp. 104-107, quote pp. 106.

⁵ Reagan, John H. Reagan, "Memoirs: With Special Reference to Secession and the Civil War," The Neale Publishing Co., New York, 1906, pp. 81-82, quote on pp. 82.

⁶ Reagan, John H. Reagan, "Memoirs: With Special Reference to Secession and the Civil War," The Neale Publishing Co., New York, 1906,

⁷ Reagan, John H., "Words of Regan," *Dallas Morning News*, April 25, 1902, page 3.

⁸ "Men Who Wore Gray," *Dallas Morning News*, April 29, 1897, page 1.

⁹ Du Bois, W.E.B., "The Lie of History as It Is Taught Today," from "W.E.B. Du Bois: A Reader," edited by Andrew Paschal, Collier Books edition, New York, 1993, pp. 115-120.