

O P I N I O N



Letters to the Editor...

The Nugget welcomes contributions from its readers, which must include the writer's name, address and phone number. Letters to the Editor is an open forum for the community and contains unsolicited opinions not necessarily shared by the Editor. The Nugget reserves the right to edit, omit, respond or ask for a response to letters submitted to the Editor. Letters should be no longer than 300 words. Unpublished items are not acknowledged or returned. The deadline for all letters is noon Monday.

To the Editor:

Your October 13 article on the two emergency air transport services in our area was informative, and I am truly grateful to have these professional emergency services available to us in Sisters Country. I have great respect and admiration for the medical and aircrew personnel and for the lifesaving work done by both Life Flight and AirLink.

I am, however, less enthusiastic about the membership arrangements needed for these two services. As discussed in the article, one must buy full membership in both services to ensure that the cost of an emergency air evacuation will be covered. If a family has signed up with only one company, they may discover in an emergency that the response comes from the other — resulting in huge out-of-pocket costs despite thinking they were insured against this.

I do in fact subscribe to both services for the reasons above. But this is essentially paying double for a single product. If hypothetically only two auto-insurance companies existed, and drivers were obliged to pay full premiums to both because it was uncertain which company might cover an accident, I doubt that arrangement would be acceptable to consumers.

The obvious solution is reciprocal membership. In this arrangement, membership in one service would cover an emergency response by either provider, with appropriate cost reimbursements exchanged between the two companies afterwards. Although the companies were described as “working toward” reciprocity, there is significant financial disincentive for either company to do so. This is because it

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Sisters Weather Forecast

Courtesy of the National Weather Service, Pendleton, Oregon

Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday	Monday
Sunny 45/25	Chance rain/snow 47/28	Partly sunny 55/29	Chance showers 54/32	Mostly cloudy 50/26	Chance showers 44/na

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442 E. Main Ave., P.O. Box 698, Sisters, Oregon 97759
Tel: 541-549-9941 | Fax: 541-549-9940 | editor@nuggetnews.com



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A past that is never past

By Jim Cornelius
News Editor

*“The past is not dead.
It's not even past.”*

— William Faulkner

We have seen the truth of Faulkner's aphorism demonstrated starkly of late. From battles over the display of the Confederate flag to efforts to supplant Eurocentric commemorations of history with ones that recognize the plight and contributions of indigenous peoples, the past continues to be powerfully present in our contemporary cultural debates.

History and heritage rub up against personal identity. When people perceive a threat to their sense of identity, they may become fearful and defensive. Debates over events long past become weighted with contemporary significance — and fraught with anger.

For those who advocate for replacing “Columbus Day” with “Indigenous Peoples Day,” such a move is an important symbolic way to acknowledge the high price paid by the original inhabitants of the continent for the brutal advent of Western civilization. For others, such a move is an implicit rejection of Western civilization itself.

Triumphalist, patriotic history once taught us that bold men chased riches in land, furs, minerals, timber — and the pure prestige of planting the flag in a “howling wilderness.” In doing so, they created a land of liberty and justice for all. Nowadays, we see things differently. Today, we don't like to think much about the way the world we live in was made, about the graves our homes are built upon. America was born in sin — the sins of African slavery, and of genocide of the native population — and that's an uncomfortable reality to acknowledge.

It's also a reality we are called upon to acknowledge while looking backwards through a lens of comfort and security and a kind of virtuous piety and self-regard. Conquest has never been pretty. Western civilization is not uniquely “guilty” — except of being exceptionally good at it.

It is right to acknowledge the cost of conquest, both in human terms and in terms of environmental

degradation. The cost was high. Whole peoples disappeared, ravaged by war and even more by disease. And bold men with rifles shot whole species to the brink — and past the brink — of extinction.

Yet to regret this epic burst of exploration and conquest, and condemn the men who pushed it forward, is the rankest kind of hypocrisy. Might as well condemn tectonic plates for shifting.

It's true that the “wilderness” wasn't empty. Native peoples thrived there, with a fierce love for their homeland every bit as potent as the land lust that drove the European interlopers. It's also true that those native peoples had displaced others.

In the words of historian T.R. Fehrenbach:

“The Mexica admitted to Cortés that they had come into the Valley of Mexico without lands, but that they had seized the lands of others with shield and arrow. They understood when Cortés told them that he had come with shield and spear to take their lands and give them to others...”

“Had every American told the Plains Indians what many already knew, that because the white men had come the tribes' days were numbered, and that as conquerors they demanded the Indians' lands, the warrior societies could have understood this perfectly ...” (Comanche: The Destruction of a People).

So, what to do with this history that is never past?

“Columbus Day” was created as a federal holiday in 1937 — a nod to Italian-American political interests. We could, and perhaps should, replace it with another “day.” But is that really the most effective way to come to grips with the history?

To do that, we must *truly* understand it, in all its complex, contradictory and messy humanity. Then, perhaps, we can productively debate its meaning, acknowledge wrong and celebrate success, as we move into an uncharted future.

Our nation, born in sin and strife, *did* — often in spite of itself — create a beacon of freedom and hope for the world. It's up to us — all of us — to keep that beacon burning.