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OPINION

Nat Turner's Mental and Military Motivations

Resistance was constant and two fold

BY EZRAH AHARONE

Nate Parker's movie *The Birth of a Nation* has revived the question: What caused Nat Turner's 1831 uprising? Turner, first of all,



was not a deranged misfit who acted outside of a historical context of previous African freedom fighters. Throughout slavery's duration, resistance was not only constant and fatal, but two fold, Africans equally resisted both slavery and Americanization.

Contrary to popular "feel good" versions of history, the "fight against slavery" should not be presumed as a "fight to become American." For enslaved Africans like Turner, Americanization was the obstacle -- not the vehicle -- to the freedom they sought.

A largely overlooked factor that forged Africans into Americans was their inability to muster enough weapons to militarily free themselves from Americaniza-

tion. Along with the 2nd Amendment which allowed whites to bear arms, slavery was also backed by America's military, which is why 800 soldiers deployed against Turner. Within this context of warfare (which fomented at least 313 recorded armed uprisings), there is provable evidence that Africans became Americans -- not by virtue of winning the Civil War -- but by virtue of prior military defeats.

CNN Town Halls won't discuss this, but numerous captives were already soldiers in Africa beforehand, who like Turner, held deep monotheistic beliefs. Once in America these battle-tested troops launched guerilla forms of warfare whenever possible, using whatever weapons possible, with clear theological convictions that fused spirituality with revolution. Naturally, after being forcibly uprooted 5,000 miles from long-lived kingdoms and cultures, they deemed Euro-Americans as new adversaries, and Americanization was certainly not their goal.

This explains why tens of thousands of Africans militarily fought with the British against America

during the Revolutionary War and the War of 1812. Plus, another 100,000 fled or died fleeing to join British forces. Conclusive stats are unknown, but from a sheer combat perspective, the Revolutionary War could be framed as the largest uprising of Africans who ever unified to militarily free themselves from Americanization, including Africans reportedly owned by George Washington and Thomas Jefferson.

Despite being defeated, it is still necessary to credit legitimacy to such Africans, beyond distorted narratives that label Turner an "African American" even though men like him sought America's military downfall. Olaudah Equiano (an Ibo, captured at age 11, who published the first surviving "slave account" in 1789: *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano*) wrote, "When you make men slaves, you compel them to live with you in a state of war." Once freed in 1792, he bolted like lightning to England.

Haiti's independence (1804) ignited further military motivations. On July 4th, 1804, instead of recognizing US independence, hundreds of blacks in Philadelphia stormed Independence Hall to live

Haitian independence vicariously. Flanked in military formations, they carried swords and attacked whites for two days, chanting "We will show them [whites] St. Domingo [bloodshed like Haiti]."

So, by the dawn of his 1831 uprising, Turner was just one cog in a long continuum of such idealists. Other notable military operations involved Fort Mose in Florida (1738-1763); the Stono Uprising in South Carolina (1739); the German Coast Uprising in Louisiana (1811); Negro Fort in Florida (1815); and David Walker's Appeal (1828) advocated revolution and religion (even though Walker was more an assimilationist than sovereignist).

Men like Turner also equated themselves to other hemispheric freedom fighters (in nations like Argentina, Chile, Bolivia, Columbia) who gained independence, including Euro-Americans. For example, before being hanged for their 1800 planned uprising, one of Gabriel Prosser's soldiers retorted, "I have nothing more to offer than what General [George] Washington would have had to offer, had he been taken by the British and put to trial. I have adventured my life in endeavoring to obtain the

liberty of my countrymen, and am a willing sacrifice in their cause." Translation, he meant, "Bring It: I stand upon universal principles of freedom that -- just like you -- I will never compromise."

Interestingly, in a 60 Minutes interview, Nate Parker paralleled Nat Turner to George Washington in terms of their shared idealisms to "Birth a Nation." From this perspective, whether you agree or disagree with Turner's guerilla tactics, his comparative cause to end tyranny was no less honorable than America's founders.

Tyranny however can be a very peculiar and subjective creature, since "one man's tyranny can be another man's liberty." Hence, George Washington, who enslaved and tyrannized over 300 Africans is deified on Mt. Rushmore as a hero, while conversely, Nat Turner who fought against slavery's tyranny is demonized as a savage. To this contradiction, James Baldwin once quipped, "In the U.S., violence and heroism have been made synonymous . . . except when it comes to blacks."

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His Bigoted Majesty Protects Harmful Language

The ridicule of preferred pronouns

BY JILL RICHARDSON

A University of Michigan student has officially changed his personal pronoun to "His Majesty."



The student, who is politically conservative, did so to call attention to and ridicule the university policy which allows students to select their own designated personal pronouns.

A personal pronoun is the term others use to refer to you when they don't use your name: he, she, her, him, they, them, etc. The English language doesn't offer a gender-neutral singular pronoun other than "it," but we generally do not use the objectifying term "it" to refer to people.

Most of us are assigned a sex at birth -- male or female -- and we grow into the corresponding gender identity that matches our sex. That gender binary dominates

our western social structure and is instilled in us from birth.

From the moment the doctors told my mom "It's a girl," I began to identify as a woman. It's a privilege that I've never felt the categories of "man" and "woman" constrain me in any way. I embrace my womanhood. I am attracted to men.

But that's not so for all Americans.

Society viewed Caitlyn Jenner as the all-American masculine ideal until she publicly came out as a transwoman. And some people don't feel like they belong to either gender at all. The "norm" of binary classification doesn't account for people who are transgender, intergender, genderqueer, agender, or genderfluid.

As an educator, I have students of all backgrounds in my classes. And I've learned it's not wise to make assumptions about my students.

It's not my business who's questioning their gender or sexual orientation, or who grew up poor, or who has a mental illness -- but

all of those situations and more may be going on in my students' lives.

They're all my students. I want to make our classroom a comfortable environment for learning, and that includes referring to them by the personal pronoun they identify with.

His Majesty, at the University of Michigan, is attempting to show that students who change their pronouns are doing so arbitrarily, with no basis in reality.

His Majesty is likely a straight white man. If so, he's probably never had to deal with misogyny, homophobia, or racism. He's likely never had to act a role prescribed by society as masculine even though it didn't fit the person he knew himself to be.

Often it's people like him -- those in the most privileged demographics of our society -- who balk at "political correctness."

It's silly, they may think, even arbitrary, as His Majesty contends. Or it's an annoying way that people try to police the behavior of others for no good reason.

But political correctness is not

an end in itself. There are real harms inflicted upon those whose identities are erased by society. And they start with homo and transphobic jokes, language, or publicity stunts -- calling yourself "His Majesty," for example -- at the expense of transgender and genderqueer people.

Those who oppose "political correctness" are simply trying to remain at the top of an unjust society and shield themselves from their own intolerance.

Preferred personal pronouns help to ensure that already marginalized groups are not excluded

and recognize the real pain that insensitivity causes. And while you may not personally understand the life experiences of someone very different from you, that doesn't mean you can't be kind to them.

In short, another phrase for "political correctness" is "not being a jerk," and the University of Michigan is taking the right steps in helping to foster a safe learning environment for every student.

OtherWords columnist Jill Richardson is the author of Recipe for America: Why Our Food System Is Broken and What We Can Do to Fix It.

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