

Freedom's View

A Commentary on Government from Atop the Capitol

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IN CELEBRATION OF MARTIN LUTHER KING DAY

January 15, 2018

WASHINGTON, DC ~ *Armed Freedom*

Recently, I've been having a lot tears of many different sorts. In observance of this Martin Luther King, Jr. Day, I'd like to tell you about them. Although this story is certainly personal, I hope your experience might resonate with my own.

One hundred years before Martin Luther King's 1963 "I Have a Dream" speech to a quarter-million people, over 60,000 of whom were white, newly freed African-American slaves hoisted me to my home atop the U. S. Capitol Dome. I had tears in my eyes that day for sure. It was quite moving for me to have this place of honor above the building in which the nation's freely elected legislators would enact laws intended "to form a more perfect union, establish Justice, insure domestic tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general welfare, and secure the blessings of liberty."

I was similarly moved that Philip Reid, *a slave* in the employ of Clark Mills' foundry in Washington, assisted in creating me. *He alone* could figure out how to separate the five sections of my original plaster mold that had been created in Italy.

Mr. Reid was emancipated in 1862 and continued to work on my creation. Nobody, including me, knows if he witnessed my being hoisted to my new home. I sure hope so. All I know is that Mr. Reid was, by 1865, in business for himself in DC and was "highly esteemed by all who knew him."

Philip Reid was from one of those African countries Mr. Trump derided as "shitholes."



A 1993 close-up of Armed Freedom prior to her being lowered to repair her severe pitting and corrosion. ~ Architect of the Capitol

Talk about tears. As one who is armed and sworn to protect our freedom, it's easier for me to find my anger. But I *also* feel immense sadness when the president, of all people, talks like that about nations populated by people of color. Having a bronze skin, I'm proudly a woman of color, too. Unknown to my recent restorers is that the pitting and corrosion of my skin is not only the result of air pollution and the ravages of time.

It's also the result of my weeping for what we are losing. Through the years, it has happened often. But in my 155 years up here, I've *never* seen such an existential threat to our democracy as that presented by Mr. Trump. In ancient Rome, the barbarians would have been defeated had not the empire lost its values and rotted from within. This racist barbarian (*i.e.*, rude, wild, uncultured) in the White House is a dangerous sucking chest wound in the body politic, and I'm both angry *and* sad. (*continued at right*)

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I have come to appreciate the importance of these tears of sadness because they enable me to grieve the losses all of us are experiencing, even as my anger helps me to fight for their restoration. It seems to me that I need them both.

Not grieving our current losses is dangerous. That's because *grief-denied* leads to *cynicism*, and *cynicism* to *dropping out*. Don't. I need you to keep fighting for hope!

Our tears of grief are even *chemically different* from tears that physical pain might cause. And both are different, still, from another form of tears. Let me tell you about *them*. Here's the story, adapted from a news post:

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## REALIZING AGAIN OUR COMMON HUMANITY

MOVED CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

At a Texas middle school of 900, where 90% of the students are from low-income families, 150 male students signed up for a "Breakfast with Dads." Concerned that many of the students might not have a dad to invite, the call went out on social media for at least 50 men to show up and give one hour to the cause. 600 men showed up.

So the organizers moved the event to the gym in order to accommodate more guests. There were so many volunteers, sometimes 4 or 5 mentors huddled with one student. "The Tie Man" had ties distributed, and the mentors taught the students how to tie a half-Windsor knot: a kind of rite-of-passage saying "You're a man, now." "The look of awe – even disbelief – in students' eyes as they made their way through the crowd of "Dads" was astonishing."<sup>1</sup>

As I read that, tears welled up in my eyes. (Don't tell my restorers!) These were *the tears of being moved*. They come in moments of awe, such as human compassion, kindness, unexpected graciousness. Sometimes they take the breath away, a lump forms in the throat. Transcending all of our intense divisiveness, these are some of the signs and reminders of our *common* humanity.

<sup>1</sup> *The Washington Post*, "Answer Sheet" January 6, 2018, by Valerie Strauss

The breathless inhalations, these tears and throaty lumps, form part of the basis for our national motto: *e. Pluribus Unum* – one out of many. An awareness of their ubiquity can help to bind us together.

If we but have eyes to see, we will find - and be found - by these events. Or perhaps, most often unknowingly, *we will be a part of making them happen*.

Whether our tears express our sadness and grief, our physical pain - or sometimes even our laughter! – they all connect us in a common bond with others – even those with whom we disagree. So, too, the tears that come with being deeply moved. Together, these salty tears we all share can become part of the content of our conversations. But only if we have the courage to own and share them.

In the coming mid-year elections, I'd like to hear lifted *this* campaign slogan: **America! It's for all of us!**

I want to close this by sharing with you the verses of a 1934 hymn written by a public school teacher living in Hawaii, Lloyd Stone. The tune is by Jean Sibelius, who wrote it as a patriotic offering in 1899. "Finlandia," is the name of a larger work of seven pieces which reflect portions of Finnish history. "Out of agitated and tumultuous opening music - symbolizing the struggles of the Finnish people - the serenity of the hymn-like melody emerges,

symbolizing hope and resolution."<sup>2</sup>

May its words inspire *us* toward *knowing and loving* those who are allegedly so "different" from us. That was the "dream" Martin Luther King, Jr. spoke about. May we *all* begin to dream it afresh!

### THIS IS MY SONG

This is my song, O God of all the nations,  
A song of peace for lands afar and mine.  
This is my home, the country where my heart is,  
Here are my hopes, my dreams, my holy shrine.  
But other hearts in other lands are beating,  
With hopes and dreams as true and high as mine.

My country's skies are bluer than the ocean,  
And sunlight beams on clover leaf and pine.  
But other lands have sunlight too, and clover,  
And skies are everywhere as blue as mine.  
O hear my song, thou God of all the nations,  
A song of peace for their land and for mine.

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/resources/history-of-hymns-this-is-my-song>

