



The CommUUnicator

Newsletter of the Unitarian Universalist
Fellowship of Waynesboro

Commemorating Presidents

I was born in Illinois and lived there most of my life. In Illinois, George Washington's Birthday, now called Presidents Day in much of the country, was often ignored. Oh, it was a bank holiday, a postal holiday, a day when federal offices were closed. But schools and state offices were closed on Abraham Lincoln's birthday. It was the Land of Lincoln, after all, where school children were herded through Lincoln's Tomb in Springfield, Illinois, a shrine where the strictest of church etiquette is enforced.

Here, naturally, it is the nation's first president, a Virginian, whose birthday is enshrined. With the elimination last year of Virginia's Confederate-based holiday known as Lee-Jackson Day, George Washington Day is one of three holidays named for an individual officially observed in Virginia. The others are Martin Luther King Jr. Day and Columbus Day. And the writing may be on the wall for Columbus Day. It is now common knowledge that Columbus brought hell to the people of the Caribbean. He is no one to celebrate.

I often ponder what it means to celebrate an individual by naming a holiday or some institution for them? What does it mean to put their likeness on our money? I mean, I have lived in Jackson and Jefferson Counties in Illinois and live on Jefferson Avenue here. Yet those presidents are not directly connected to

any of these places. I lived in Charleston, Illinois, a Midwestern town built on a grid of north-south numbered streets and east-west named after presidents, in historical order. The town ran out of east-west-oriented expansion before it reached the 20th-century presidents, with later subdivisions on winding streets and cul-de-sacs. But if Charleston had grown enough and still thought in the original scheme of streets and avenues, would they now have a Nixon Avenue? A Trump Avenue?

I think that there is something different about a pattern that includes every president – good, mediocre, bad, or evil – in historical order than there is about choosing a single president to hold a place of honor in naming a county or putting their face on a \$20 bill. In my mind, there is probably something very different about observing George Washington Day in Virginia or Lincoln's Birthday in Illinois than in observing Columbus Day anywhere in the US. And I tend to have my doubts about the places where the observed holiday is Presidents Day, all lumped together, as if all past presidents had somehow become okay merely by virtue of holding the highest elective office in the land.

As recent events have made painfully clear, being president does not purify or justify the office holder. We should never try to erase evils from our history. Keeping a destructive leader in the historic line up allows us to assess

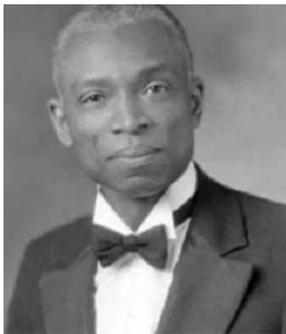
seriously our current situation and avoid past evils. But honoring Columbus with a holiday, for example? We can stop doing that.

I hope George Washington Day inspired your reflections too!

Peace and Blessings,
Rev. Paul

Notable African Americans you May Not Have Heard of

Dr. John Morton-Finney was an accomplished lawyer, civil rights activist and academic. He was born in 1889, one of seven children of a former slave, and he died in 1998 at the age of



108. Morton-Finney had a lifelong love of education and earned a total of eleven university degrees in the fields of history, mathematics, languages and the law. Most of his degrees were earned while employed

for 47 years as a teacher and administrator in the Indianapolis School System.

Morton-Finney taught languages, social studies and mathematics at Crispus Attucks High School, Indianapolis' only school for African American students. He was fluent in Latin, Greek, French and Spanish, and conversant in German and Portuguese.

In the 1930's, Dr. Morton-Finney began to study law. He was admitted to the Indiana Bar in 1935 and began to practice law while continuing his career in education. At the age of 83, Morton-Finney was admitted to practice before the U.S. Supreme Court in 1972. He was inducted into the National Bar Association



Hall of Fame in 1991. When Morton-Finney retired from practicing law at the age of 107, he was believed to have been the oldest practicing attorney in the United States.

Dr. Morton-Finney is the recipient of numerous awards and honors, including being recognized for his accomplishments by President George H.W. Bush at a White House dinner in 1990. Learn more about him on the web page of [Butler University's Diversity Scholarship Program](#), which is named for him.

Member News

Dave Rudiak was discharged from Augusta Health last week with Hospice care. He had dealt with congestive heart failure for a number of years, and now his heart and kidneys are failing. He is on IVs but is alert and ambulatory. His partner, Barbara Wright, encourages phone calls but not visits as he is not yet vaccinated.

Engagement

Cynthia and George Thompson have announced the engagement of their daughter Haley (who grew up in our Fellowship) to Davis Spurlin. A July wedding is planned. The couple is pictured here with Haley's son Coleman.



The UFW Pledge Drive is underway through February 28. Your generous pledge and prompt return of the [pledge form](#) will be appreciated.