



Forgiveness

We have witnessed two uncommon acts of forgiveness this spring and summer.

In a small town in northern Germany, Oskar Groening, 94, the Nazi SS officer known as the “accountant of Auschwitz,” went on trial as an accessory to the murder of 300,000 Jews. As the world watched, the first witness to testify for the prosecution was Eva Kor, 81, founder of a Holocaust museum in Terre Haute, Indiana. She forgave Groening as she has forgiven all the Nazis who murdered her family and tortured her and her sister at the notorious World War II concentration camp. Eva explains why in an interview on page 102.

The other act of forgiveness occurred when several family members of the nine African Americans who died in the mass shooting at Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston, South Carolina, confronted the alleged killer, a white supremacist, and forgave him.

These acts of grace are deeply admirable, but their circumstances serve to remind us once again of the two most horrific crimes committed by mankind — genocide and slavery. And how racism, at the core of both evils, never goes away.

Anti-Semitism in Europe is ripe again to the point where Jewish schools, synagogues, and institutions of any kind need to be protected by armed guards. In America, 150 years after the end of the Civil War, the Confederate flag is just now starting to come down in the capitals of Southern states. But still persisting are the false myths about noble causes for which the South seceded.

The South seceded to preserve slavery. South Carolina, the first, proclaimed, “[The Northern states] have united in the election of [Abraham Lincoln] whose opinions and purposes are hostile to slavery” Mississippi followed with “Our position is thoroughly identified with the institution of slavery — the greatest material interest of the world.” The nine other seceding states made similar statements in their declarations of war. Yet many today, mainly in the

South, cling to the notion that secession was about states’ rights and “Northern aggression.” They have textbooks and monuments to prove it.

As James W. Loewen, author of *The Confederate and Neo-Confederate Reader*, wrote in *The Washington Post* on July 3, “As soon as the Confederates laid down their arms, some picked up their pens and began to distort what they had done and why We are still digging ourselves out from under the misinformation they spread, which has manifested in our public monuments and our history books.”

When Eva Kor landed in Germany to testify at the trial of Oskar Groening, she did not see Nazi flags flying. It’s illegal. Her taxi from the airport did not travel on Adolf Eichmann Autobahn nor did she pass statues of Adolf Hitler or Heinrich Himmler.

Yet African Americans, who are still discriminated against and whose ancestors — millions of them — were murdered or brutally subjugated, see “heroic” defenders of slavery continue to be honored.

In 1987, President Ronald Reagan, speaking in Germany about the wall dividing East and West Berlin, implored, “Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall.”

We have a wall here in America that’s long past due for demolition. It’s made up of thousands of monuments honoring Robert E. Lee and other famous racists. We have roadways and military bases bearing the names of Confederate generals, and we have schools and official buildings honoring Ku Klux Klan leaders; they all need to be “torn down” and renamed for real heroes. Reverend Clementa C. Pinckney, slain pastor of Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church, would be a good choice. And so would Eva Kor, who found it in her being to confront and forgive an old Nazi.

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