

There Is Greatness in the Past—Despite What Critical Theorists Try to Tell Us

I grew up as one of eight pugnacious boys in a family of 12 children. In a family this large, disagreements naturally arise, and Dad set up a boxing ring in the basement to empower us to settle our differences. The older brother got a lefthand boxing glove, the younger got two gloves—that was the entirety of our sire the Marquis of Bellevue's rules. Perhaps that's even why I became a linebacker later in my youth.

I never attained greatness as a linebacker, nor have I attained greatness in other areas compared to many others who went before me, but because of those people—my family members—I can at least attempt to be great.

Such a message runs counter to the rather hateful, pessimistic worldview that we know as critical race theory or CRT. Such critical race theorists judge people inherently good or bad based on skin color and work to tear down societal structures in favor of an undefined utopian future. But I've realized that my own potential greatness is not constrained by the *alleged* sins of my ancestors. It's empowered by their exceptionalness.

So, rather than be mute while greedy hate-mongers clumsily try to besmirch my kin with the help of self-serving government agencies, let me tell you about my people. They were not a bunch of racists who succeeded through their white privilege which allowed them to trample on the necks of others. No, they were simple people who aspired to greatness through hard work and upright living, and their examples are what should give us hope and inspiration to do the same.

According to my father's English and Scottish side of the

family, we Barnesfolk are direct descendants of Edward, the Black Prince of England, a 13th century royal who first distinguished himself in battle as a teen. Whether or not it's true, we are confirmed descendants of several *lairds* and knights.

My family has not evidenced the Black Prince claim with research yet, but I don't believe I'm descended from a bunch of ancient con-artists claiming royal lineage for hundreds of years. Some of my siblings aren't so sure.

My first English ancestor in America arrived here during the Great Migration—in 1630. Another ancestor was a founding father of Amesbury, MA (founded 1668). Yet another—Frederick Hawes—was a Union Army hero. He signed up shortly after the Civil War began, fibbing about his age since he wasn't quite 16. He served for four years in an artillery regiment, fought in several battles, and received field commissions.

My mother's Croatian side of the family has only been here about 110 years, while her Irish side has been here for about 150 years. One of those Irish ancestors was a fisherman on the Great Lakes over 100 years ago. He wrecked his boat and lost everything when he was already over 50. He'd lost his first wife to death, remarried, and at 65 and 43, respectively, he and his second wife welcomed a baby boy, my Irish ancestor who kept that line going, quite well in fact, as my mother's Irish-American father was one of 12 children.

One of my mother's tall, Croatian-American uncles escaped the backbreaking drudgery of mining in Virginia, Minnesota that his father had come to as an immigrant by attending college and playing football for the University of Tennessee. He married a belle from an old Southern family. His brother fought for the U.S. in the Battle of the Bulge. Their parents had been orphans as children, and the father came to the country with nothing, sending for his wife and young daughter five years later.

White privilege? Ha!

Closer to my generation, Dad served a short stint in the Navy as a young man, then later served in the Army during the Korean War in the 1950s, spending his service time mostly in Germany as he was one of just two men in his company not to go to Korea. His self-employed contractor father died when Dad was 17, leaving a wife and six kids behind. Dad took the G.I. Bill route, and he and his mother graduated from college at the same time—he as an engineer, and her, a teacher.

My parents only planned on having four children but became committed Christians and decided to have as many children as the Lord would provide. I am the fifth child, biblically named, and dedicated by my father to the Lord.

When the steel industry imploded from being dumb, fat, and happy in the 1980s and Dad lost his job with U.S. Steel, Mum started an in-home day care which she grew into a day care center with a couple of locations away from our home. She was such a bleeding heart that many people took advantage of her day care's long hours, and many bilked her on pay for caring for their little ones.

Structural racism? Phooey.

There are a lot of black and white kids who would still view my late mother as a sort of grandmother, who they loved. She was very loving, and beautiful—everyone who knew her could see that.

My ancestors may not seem all that great in worldly goods and achievements, but they were great in that they had a meaningful existence, working hard and living in a way that their descendants can admire. Young people need role models like that, and many of them are angry today because they lack such models of excellence, writer Mark Bauerlein states in a recent [article for American Greatness](#).

“There is greatness to be enjoyed ... there are talents to revere; the past contains wonders,” Bauerlein writes. “Without that belief, our 30-year-olds are disappointed, uncertain, pessimistic, and resentful. It’s a natural response. ... They want a meaningful existence, and they look for it in false gods of social justice and the like, unable to find it where they should, in church, in tradition, in *humanitas*, in country, and in role models.”

My role models are in my own family. I learn from their examples every day. My siblings, for instance, act nobly and put others first. They lead by example, patterning the good behavior they want to see in others. And it is this simple greatness—both in the past and in the present—that should inspire us and the younger generations to take heart and follow their example.

And if you can’t find such inspiration in your own family, feel free to use mine.

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