

TESTIMONY FOR THE PENNSYLVANIA HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES JUDICIARY COMMITTEE
SPECIAL TASK FORCE ON HATE CRIMES, TERRORISM AND ARSON -- OCTOBER 22, 1996

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Long ago when this troubled century was much younger, a boy of sixteen first entered the vast and magnificent rotunda of this building, the capitol of Pennsylvania. His young eyes initially were awash with the architecture of gorgeous excess; however, he soon focused upon words graven in gold at the base of the great dome. These were words of William Penn, the promises and prayers of a persecuted religious sectarian bent on perfecting the troubled world of his time; that the colony would be a "holy experiment" and that "my God will make it the seed of a nation." A century later Pennsylvania indeed became the keystone in the democratic arch of the new United States, and three centuries later the holy experiment lives on, but continues to be tested.

Following the bomb which shattered the peace of an Oklahoma spring morning, three Indiana University of Pennsylvania students who happened to be from Turkey, peaceably walking Indiana's main thoroughfare, were hotly accosted by a pick-up truckload of white males accusing them of complicity in the bombing. To their verbal rescue came a native-born Pennsylvanian, a young African-American man from Erie, whose caring brought him a beating of such severity that it cost him a semester at IUP. Upon learning of this event, the young boy so moved by Penn's words and now an IUP faculty member, contacted teacher friends in Oklahoma. "Give that sweet young man a bear hug from all of us," said the president of the Oklahoma Council for the Social Studies, "We are deeply proud of him." After we Pennsylvania social studies teachers assembled several measures to console and support our beloved Oklahoma colleagues, I was invited to the annual OCSS meeting to receive their Friends of Oklahoma Council for the Social Studies award.

Upon that special occasion I was asked to try to explain why, of all the states, it was Pennsylvania which stood so closely with Oklahoma teachers amidst the agony of the bomb's aftermath. The response given was to repeat the sacred words of William Penn which had so drawn me as a boy, and to conclude: "Pennsylvania indeed became the seed of a nation and we all live the holy experiment now in every part of the United States. On that April morning someone dared defile our holy experiment. Pennsylvania serves what it sells; always are we with you and the rest of our country." I and Pennsylvanians and Oklahomans deeply thank our IUP student for his courage, for a single brave and feeling act which drew together the social studies of two states at a time of great trouble. In the same breath, I thank you and all who support your efforts for preserving and enhancing the guiding spirit of William Penn!

We know, of course, that the issues concerning us are, alas, of national --even global--scope. Virtually no place is free of the hurt and hate which divides people and reduces capacity to enjoy a peaceful polity and a prospering economy. These issues before us are at once both moral and practical. Moral in the sense of John Kennedy's statement in 1962; that the direction to be taken with these issues "is as old as the Scriptures and as recent as the Constitution of the United States." And, on the practical side, recent Pennsylvania promotional slogans designed to enhance tourism and other sectors of our economy remind us once more of our holy experiment--"You've got a Friend in Pennsylvania"--and of our being the seed of a nation--"America Starts Here." Thus, for both moral emprise and economic enterprise we must

demonstrate always to the nation, to the world, and most of all to ourselves that Pennsylvania will not tolerate intolerance.

Despite the noble intent of our founder and the many, considerable, and good efforts of successive generations of Pennsylvanians, our holy experiment has been defiled on its own turf. Any consideration of hate in Pennsylvania history must take into account that from the outset the province was the most diverse of the colonies of Great Britain in North America. Penn did not merely welcome all, he actively solicited all to come here. Initially, "all" meant all Christian sects, a considerable leap in the seventeenth century. But, as the eighteenth century moved along, "all" came to include ALL! And, by 1790 Pennsylvania may have been the first jurisdiction in modern history to take legislative action against slavery, a gradual manumission act which largely worked its desired effect within a generation. "All" now included African-Americans either free or seeking freedom, the latter aided by the state's personal liberty laws and underground railroad. Governor Andrew Curtin, though a staunch supporter of President Lincoln and the war effort, nonetheless carefully balanced the theologies of our historic peace denominations with the demands of conscription. In this we believe he recognized the considerable anti-slavery moral force they brought to bear.

The Pennsylvania demographic mosaic become evermore rich with the great migrations of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Irish and German workers and families entered in large numbers beginning in the 1830's and continuing throughout the remainder of the century. Later in the century, the heavy industry and massive urbanization which altered our physical and economic

landscapes, made of Pennsylvania one of the primary recipients of the great migrations from east, central, and southern Europe. Additionally, the Great Migration of southern African-Americans contributed ever-substantially to the Commonwealth's demographic richness. If we were one of the world's most diverse and cosmopolitan peoples in the eighteenth century, we were much more so by the opening of the twentieth. Although the numbers are much slackened the trend toward further diversity continues. Even relatively homogenous populations find reasons to fuss and fight with one another, but consider the prospects for hurt and hate in a holy experiment whose fundamental belief in toleration enticed so many to her Commonwealth! It is exactly Pennsylvania's considerable success that also sets circumstances where people for whatsoever reasons, real or imagined, may inflict totally unwarranted suffering upon others.

Recognizing the considerable merit and strength to be imparted by any consideration of Pennsylvania's rich social and cultural history, we must turn to some incidents and trends in the Commonwealth's past that make us feel less pleased with ourselves. The following comments are in no-way a comprehensive view of troubles we Pennsylvanians have caused each other, but perhaps may suffice to reveal something of the complexity of such matters.

Native people in a place called North America saw what was called Pennsylvania to have been a rather late item in the long parade of European colonial endeavors. Hardly the stoic innocents sometimes portrayed by white image-makers, Native people in Pennsylvania by the 1680's, some of whom were refugees from other colonies, seem well aware of their increasingly precarious situations. Good intent and sound relations early established in Pennsylvania folded in a generation to the demands of European land-hunger. Often trying to play the empires

against another in vain efforts for survival in Pennsylvania, Native people either found themselves on the wrong side and vanquished as traitors or to be forgotten by the winner. Survival was the only possible victory and that would be won further west--for a time. Meanwhile, the Cornplanter band of Seneca received a land grant in northwestern Pennsylvania from the Washington administration and, therefore, remained in Pennsylvania until removal by the Kennedy brothers in the early 1960's. Today, these Seneca have rejoined a community in upstate New York and other Pennsylvania tribal members reside in former Indian Territory, Oklahoma. Here and there, mostly in the parts of Pennsylvania less affected by others, Native people carried on their activities while often merging in time with the Euro culture.

Pennsylvania, however, has played a vital role in the reform of United States Indian policy throughout American history, notwithstanding the fact that so few Native people remained in its midst. Key among these was the hosting from 1879 to 1918 of the Bureau of Indian Affairs' flagship training institution, The Carlisle Indian Industrial School. At Carlisle the goal was to assimilate young Native people by way of a curriculum that was both academic and applied--a sort of outcomes-based education of the time. A highly-touted apprenticeship system brought young Indians from all parts of North America into close and often loving contact with the larger Pennsylvania population. In hosting the Carlisle School and supporting the endeavors of its young charges, Pennsylvania may well have contributed, at least indirectly, to the founding of the first secular, inter-tribal Indian organization known. Founded in 1911 by Native people who were students and/or staffers at Carlisle, the Society of American Indians set the

foundation both for other organizations to follow and for a range of Native American political successes throughout much of this century.

The first large non-Protestant Christian group to arrive in Pennsylvania, Irish Catholics had been here since late colonial times. However, events both political and economic drove thousands of rural and somewhat impoverished Irish people to Pennsylvania during the 1830's-1850's. The greatest Irish immigration push factor, of course, was the potatoe famine of 1845, and key pull factors included work opportunities on the Pennsylvania Canal and, after its 1846 chartering, the Pennsylvania Railroad. Anti-Irish sentiment soon appeared, based mostly upon fears such as: their adhering to the Roman church, their acceptance of poverty and low pay, their lifestyle of alleged carousing and fighting, and their rapidly increasing numbers both by immigration and procreation. Riots involving anti-Irish forces emerged as early as 1833 along the west branch of the Pennsylvania Canal in the vicinity of Jersey Shore with state militia restoring order. Later, as rail construction headquartered in Greensburg, there were anti-Irish riots. Perhaps the most significant anti-Irish activity in terms of both issues and damage occurred in Philadelphia during 1844 where two churches and about fifty Irish homes were destroyed. Bible readings and religious ceremonies in public schools were the surface issues, but much more was deemed to have been at stake--the very purity of the republic, according to some. A separate Catholic school system emerged from the fray and Philadelphia County made restitution under state law to the Irish suffering damages. The anti-immigrant leaders moved into the political arena from the streets and overt anti-Irish behavior abated a time. However, the arrival of late nineteenth-century "Shanty Irish" into Pennsylvania brought forth another round of anti-Irish activity by way of the American

Association, a vitriolic anti-immigration group, and the omnipresence of signs at places of employment: "Irish need not apply." But, for their part, Pennsylvania Irish have not always been of hospitable sentiment toward others. Despite distinguished Civil War service by Pennsylvania's Irish, historian Bruce Catton quotes some of them insisting, "I ain't fightin' no war for no naygars!" A procession of Irish or Irish-American bishops held long and firm control over their co-religionists as successive immigration waves diversified the ranks of the Pennsylvania faithful. Only relatively recently have non-Irish clerics risen to the top rungs of Pennsylvania Catholicism. Moreover, the Irish themselves have been riven by splits such as that between "Lacé-Curtain" and "Shanty" Irish, often but not always a demarcation between earlier and later arrivals. These extended observations about my own national-origin group are provided because they illustrate the complexities of both inter- and intra-group discord and control.

Strongly owing to its distinguished anti-slavery record and the early establishment of vibrant African-American urban communities, Pennsylvania became a highly promising prospect for post-Civil War blacks departing the South. By the early twentieth century the Great Migration north substantially increased the size of older African-American communities and created new ones such as in Coatesville. As all too often was the case, however, there was no welcome mat and rejection of the rural southern newcomers was common. A series of highly unfortunate and emotionally charged events in Coatesville during 1911 brought about the incineration of a recently arrived African-American man on a nearby farm. A more full account of these events is found in the Pennsylvania Council

for the Social Studies anti-hate project curriculum materials distributed to you earlier. Consult pages 40-48, noting especially the largely vain attempts to bring justice and reconciliation for this unpardonable travesty. Despite all their best efforts, Commonwealth courts, Governor John Tener, Ex-President Theodore Roosevelt, and W.E.B. DuBois were unable to bring this matter to proper closure. In fact, an anti-lynching bill introduced into the Legislature in 1913 required the passage of a decade before it was signed into Pennsylvania law by Governor Gifford Pinchot in 1923.

Was much learned? Perhaps. Lynchings were declared illegal, but wholesale expulsions of African-Americans from a Pennsylvania city could be attempted. Again, following an unfortunate series of event in the Rosedale section of Johnstown, the city's mayor felt he had the emotional and political support sufficient to back his order that all recently arrived blacks leave town post-haste. There were no provisions for financial settlement of likely property loss nor for transportation, temporary housing en route, and the like. The mayor was up for re-election, and Johnstown's voters put him in fourth place! Nothing further was done to implement this outrageous and insulting order. See pages 69-79 for more details about this attempted expulsion of African-Americans in 1923 from Johnstown.

The Great Migration, along with the immigrations from east, central, and southern Europe combined with other factors in Pennsylvania and other states to produce a post-World war I revival of the Reconstruction-era white supremacist group, the Ku Klux Klan. Building upon its traditional antipathy for blacks, Catholics, and Jews, the KKK of the 1920's found other emotional touchstones

to exploit. In the interim between the 1870's and the 1920's organizations such as the American Protective Association had fostered notions about "race suicide" induced by the co-mingling of diverse peoples and the production of "mongrel" varieties of sub-humans--all good grist for the Klan. The disappointment verging on despair at the results of World War I, its seeming failure to deliver the high promises of President Wilson, also produced xenophobic notions convenient to the Klan. A distrust if not revulsion of all things/peoples foreign swept the land, Pennsylvania included. Labor strife and an uncertain economy due to sudden cancellation of federal war contracts fed fears of the international Communism being proclaimed by the new Soviet Union. Who was to blame for these discontents of American civilization? The KKK had targets in mind and vastly more sophisticated operational modes than during Reconstruction where sheer terror alone was deployed. Lesson plans found on these pages provide further detail about the KKK's Pennsylvania presence during the 1920's and 1930's: 50-52 (regulation of public schools), 53-60 (scapegoating in Bucks and Montgomery counties by way of a certain social acceptability in that region's public press), and 79-87 (KKK presence in Cambria County mining communities and a question-mark "suicide" in Irvona). It seems evident that the renewed Klan of the 1920's and 1930's in Pennsylvania, although still relying upon the terror engendered by its robes and nocturnal rituals, had obtained a public presence allowing for parades without hoods in some cases. It preached "Americanism" and its version of family values, honor of women, sanctity of home, and enforcement of prohibition while it lasted. To many these may have seemed innocent, even necessary, goals; but, to many others, this secret or semi-secret band of the self-delegated and self-regulated

people

was a profound evil much feared. "He's a no-good APA-SOB-Ku-Kluxer" was the curt dismissal of many a perceived bigot by Pennsylvania blacks, Catholics, Jews and others from early in my childhood until just this past week in Altoona. Some things the victims could try to resist.

Now we have arrived at a point where the technologies of terroristic hate have reached a sad level where the Legislature and other Pennsylvania government agencies must step in to safeguard our holy experiment. What should be an affair of the heart has become a matter for law enforcement. As Marlene Dietrich, a valiant anti-Nazi German film star, lamented in her German rendering of "Where Have All the Flowers Gone"--"Was ist geschehen?"--what has been and is happening?

Ironically, our problem is of our own making as a holy experiment devoted to responsible, respectful relations among persons of many and varied appearances and backgrounds. And the irony is compounded by the possibility that stern government measures may be needed to preserve and enhance the holy experiment, hardly the democratic minimalist government of the Enlightenment. On the eve of another time of great troubles, our only Pennsylvania President of the United States, James Buchanan, toasted the Commonwealth at a public gathering. "To our good, great old state," he declared. Having faith in our holy experiment, let us move forward with imagination and resultant sound legislation or other measures to serve the decency of the 99.9% virtuous and caring folks of Pennsylvania--our good, great old state.