

Clarence M. Pendleton, Jr.
Chairman, U. S. Commission on Civil Rights
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A EULOGY

Our fathers taught us how to pray for them that fall in battle. We do not disserve the fallen when, in doing so, we pray for ourselves as well. Indeed, it is fair to think that our fathers desired as much, for we do not praise a brave man without recalling the noble cause in which he fell. Chairman Pendleton was a brave man, whose bravery and great self-sacrifice were summoned by the cause of America, not as a once great accomplishment but as a powerful idea.

The powerful idea that is America lives only in the souls of humans consciously undertaking to realize the idea concretely. As a people we no longer do that as we ought, for we too little believe. Clarence Pendleton believed. He took the idea of a color-blind Constitution as a victory to be gained and not just a topic of commentary to be explained. He did so because he was strong in his belief, and sustained by the hopes of our fathers.

He received from our fathers the very furnishings they most wished their posterity to preserve. They established the final principle of equality as the standard maxim and living language of hope for humanity. Penny believed them. Our fathers gave us their conviction that self-government is the native prerogative of every human being and the sure solution to every American public need. Penny believed them and wished us to believe them too—he knew that we would then recognize that there is no such thing as a “permanent underclass.” They gave us the inspiring example of building a good society from reflection and choice, and Penny believed their example was our catechism.

Our fathers gave us a sense of hope for the common purpose of our nation. Penny believed that we could accomplish their hope. Our fathers survived years of dissent and confusion and through their sacrifices gave us an articulate love of freedom. Our fathers gave us a will to affirm America, so strong that it could prevail over a Jim Crow which announced, not that “blacks are not wanted here” but that “no Americans live here.” Our fathers gave us their strength, courage, and determination, struggling through political tyranny and the indignities and sufferings of slavery. Penny is the true son of our fathers, legitimate heir of their mission.

None can be surprised that Chairman Pendleton attracted the wrath of them that believe too little in America and her fathers. When he challenged affirmative action as an unAmerican expression of racism, they felt the stings of our fathers. When he rejected the pride-corroding assumption that so-called disadvantaged citizens depended on the “care” of their would-be overseers, they who mate compassion with the forgetfulness of the claims of human dignity felt the stings of our fathers. When Penny challenged the presumption that civil rights were for some, not all Americans, and insisted that ideas and spokesmen of civil rights are not a one-note band but a symphony of American hearts and voices, civil rights monopolists felt the stings of our fathers. Penny stung his detractors because he refused to shelter them from the truth, that America is a nobler idea than they

could live with.

Penny fell while booted and spurred, actively prosecuting freedom's foes and America's prodigals before the bar of history. His mission, the mission of our fathers, became our mission. It is a mission he conveyed simply, in the conviction that America works. America works when we trust it. His faithfulness in the pursuit constitutes for us a starting point as we seek to complete our mission. We owe to our fathers, who have given us so much, to give this little more ourselves to vindicate their righteous sacrifices. Let us pray that our fathers, that Penny, who live with us still in this mission, will find not unworthy heirs to celebrate. To deserve their praises ought now to constitute our most fervent prayer.

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