

The Delray Democrat

“We Hold These Truths”¹

Michael K. Cantwell

It is easy to read The Declaration of Independence with a jaundiced eye, contrasting the ringing declaration that “all men are created equal” with the reality that many of the men who signed the document (including its principal author Thomas Jefferson) were untroubled owning other men. It is easy to point out that the term “men” was gender-specific and not some linguistic convention intended to embrace the entire human species.

Yet this revolutionary document can still bring tears to one’s eyes, especially when measured against the government we have today. Could anyone argue that a government led by Donald Trump (or George W. Bush, for that matter) has “a decent respect to the opinions of mankind”? Do Mitch McConnell and Lindsey Graham have the remotest conception of the word “honor,” much less the “Sacred Honor” our Founders mutually pledged as they risked their lives?

Where reality deviates most from aspiration is in the notion that government derives its “just powers from the consent of the governed.” If the consent of the American people actually mattered today, government would be working to increase voter turnout, not suppress it.

If the laws actually reflected the opinions of the governed, those with incomes in the hundreds of millions of dollars would not be taxed at a lower rate than a secretary or the night manager at a Burger King. Our government would be doing more, not less, to combat climate change. Black Lives Matter would be more than the name of a protest movement; it would be the basis of effective legislation to redress centuries of exploitation and murder. And the Equal Rights Amendment would finally be ratified.

November 3 may be our last chance to begin the difficult process of realizing the aspirations of our founding document.

¹ *The Delray Democrat*, July 2020, p. 1.