

A Lesson In American History

by Hugh Fitzgerald



The Trump Administration announced in its final days that a Garden of American Heroes was to be created in Washington. That status of that endeavor is now unclear, but the outgoing administration supplied a list of those who were deemed worthy of inclusion. That list is here:

“The National Garden should be composed of statues, including statues of Ansel Adams, John Adams, Samuel Adams, Muhammad Ali, Luis Walter Alvarez, Susan B. Anthony, Hannah Arendt, Louis Armstrong, Neil Armstrong, Crispus Attucks, John James Audubon, Lauren Bacall, Clara Barton, Todd Beamer, Alexander Graham Bell, Roy Benavidez, Ingrid Bergman, Irving Berlin, Humphrey Bogart, Daniel Boone, Norman Borlaug, William Bradford, Herb Brooks, Kobe Bryant, William F. Buckley, Jr., Sitting Bull, Frank Capra, Andrew Carnegie, Charles Carroll, John Carroll, George Washington Carver, Johnny Cash, Joshua Chamberlain, Whittaker Chambers, Johnny “Appleseed” Chapman, Ray Charles, Julia Child, Gordon Chung-Hoon, William Clark, Henry Clay, Samuel Clemens (Mark Twain), Roberto Clemente,

Grover Cleveland, Red Cloud, William F. "Buffalo Bill" Cody, Nat King Cole, Samuel Colt, Christopher Columbus, Calvin Coolidge, James Fenimore Cooper, Davy Crockett, Benjamin O. Davis, Jr., Miles Davis, Dorothy Day, Joseph H. De Castro, Emily Dickinson, Walt Disney, William "Wild Bill" Donovan, Jimmy Doolittle, Desmond Doss, Frederick Douglass, Herbert Henry Dow, Katharine Drexel, Peter Drucker, Amelia Earhart, Thomas Edison, Jonathan Edwards, Albert Einstein, Dwight D. Eisenhower, Duke Ellington, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Medgar Evers, David Farragut, the Marquis de La Fayette, Mary Fields, Henry Ford, George Fox, Aretha Franklin, Benjamin Franklin, Milton Friedman, Robert Frost, Gabby Gabreski, Bernardo de Gálvez, Lou Gehrig, Theodor Seuss Geisel, Cass Gilbert, Ruth Bader Ginsburg, John Glenn, Barry Goldwater, Samuel Gompers, Alexander Goode, Carl Gorman, Billy Graham, Ulysses S. Grant, Nellie Gray, Nathanael Greene, Woody Guthrie, Nathan Hale, William Frederick "Bull" Halsey, Jr., Alexander Hamilton, Ira Hayes, Hans Christian Heg, Ernest Hemingway, Patrick Henry, Charlton Heston, Alfred Hitchcock, Billie Holiday, Bob Hope, Johns Hopkins, Grace Hopper, Sam Houston, Whitney Houston, Julia Ward Howe, Edwin Hubble, Daniel Inouye, Andrew Jackson, Robert H. Jackson, Mary Jackson, John Jay, Thomas Jefferson, Steve Jobs, Katherine Johnson, Barbara Jordan, Chief Joseph, Elia Kazan, Helen Keller, John F. Kennedy, Francis Scott Key, Coretta Scott King, Martin Luther King, Jr., Russell Kirk, Jeane Kirkpatrick, Henry Knox, Tadeusz Kosciuszko, Harper Lee, Pierre Charles L'Enfant, Meriwether Lewis, Abraham Lincoln, Vince Lombardi, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, Clare Boothe Luce, Douglas MacArthur, Dolley Madison, James Madison, George Marshall, Thurgood Marshall, William Mayo, Christa McAuliffe, William McKinley, Louise McManus, Herman Melville, Thomas Merton, George P. Mitchell, Maria Mitchell, William "Billy" Mitchell, Samuel Morse, Lucretia Mott, John Muir, Audie Murphy, Edward Murrow, John Neumann, Annie Oakley, Jesse Owens, Rosa Parks, George S. Patton, Jr., Charles Willson Peale, William Penn, Oliver Hazard Perry, John J. Pershing, Edgar Allan Poe, Clark Poling, John Russell Pope, Elvis

Presley, Jeannette Rankin, Ronald Reagan, Walter Reed, William Rehnquist, Paul Revere, Henry Hobson Richardson, Hyman Rickover, Sally Ride, Matthew Ridgway, Jackie Robinson, Norman Rockwell, Caesar Rodney, Eleanor Roosevelt, Franklin D. Roosevelt, Theodore Roosevelt, Betsy Ross, Babe Ruth, Sacagawea, Jonas Salk, John Singer Sargent, Antonin Scalia, Norman Schwarzkopf, Junípero Serra, Elizabeth Ann Seton, Robert Gould Shaw, Fulton Sheen, Alan Shepard, Frank Sinatra, Margaret Chase Smith, Bessie Smith, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Jimmy Stewart, Harriet Beecher Stowe, Gilbert Stuart, Anne Sullivan, William Howard Taft, Maria Tallchief, Maxwell Taylor, Tecumseh, Kateri Tekakwitha, Shirley Temple, Nikola Tesla, Jefferson Thomas, Henry David Thoreau, Jim Thorpe, Augustus Tolton, Alex Trebek, Harry S. Truman, Sojourner Truth, Harriet Tubman, Dorothy Vaughan, C. T. Vivian, John von Neumann, Thomas Ustick Walter, Sam Walton, Booker T. Washington, George Washington, John Washington, John Wayne, Ida B. Wells-Barnett, Phillis Wheatley, Walt Whitman, Laura Ingalls Wilder, Roger Williams, John Winthrop, Frank Lloyd Wright, Orville Wright, Wilbur Wright, Alvin C. York, Cy Young, and Lorenzo de Zavala.”

It’s quite a list. Many worthies are here, some worthier than others, and you can have fun slicing and dicing the names by achievements, sex, ethnicity, veteran status, and all the other categories that come to mind in this age of the imperatively categorical. Take a good look.

Now here is my own list, of those who were not on the Trump administration’s list of American Heroes, but who I think deserve to be on it. I was not satisfied with the original list, feeling it incomplete, and I’ve composed another list, consisting of the names of the Great Overlooked, that include, among others, Fred Astaire and Charlie Chaplin. After some names I’ve added a brief additional remark. The names are not in alphabetical order, but in the order that they came to me.

Fred Astaire (dancer, actor, singer). Unbelievably, he was

left out of the original list.

Ginger Rogers (dancer, actress, singer). Another big omission and – as we all know – she did it backwards, and in high heels.

Crazy Horse (Indian warrior). Since Sitting Bull, Red Cloud, and Tecumseh are listed, why was he left out?

Geronimo (same reason). He had to spend his last days imprisoned at Fort Sills, in Lawton, Oklahoma, It's a dreary place, where servicemen turn themselves in for punishment. Surely Geronimo deserves a statue now.

Cesar Chavez (farmworker organizer). How could the admirable Chavez been left out?

President James Monroe. When I visited his house in Virginia many years ago, the FFV house tour guide, in her soft Virginia accent, pointed to a statue that had, she said, "been given to President Monroe by the people of Colombia in appreciation of the Monroe Doctrine."

Grace Kelly (actress). She moved to Monaco, lived as a princess, and died on the Riviera's Corniche), but she's still an American in my book.

Barbara Stanwyck (actress). *Double Indemnity*, and so much more.

Jack Lemmon (actor). *Some Like It Hot*. *The Apartment*.

Bayard Rustin, who organized the March on Washington, helped MLK in myriad ways, and never got the credit he deserved.

Samuel Eliot Morison (historian of America and of the U.S. Navy).

Bernard Bailyn (historian of early America).

Benny Goodman (musician). Why didn't he make the original cut?

Fats Waller (musician and singer). Same query. A genius. Died on a train at the age of 39.

Jane Addams (Hull House, social work pioneer).

Hoagy Carmichael (songwriter).

George Gershwin (composer).

Ira Gershwin (lyricist).

Lorenzo da Ponte (librettist for Mozart who ended up as a professor of Italian at Columbia).

Igor Stravinsky (composer). Russia's loss, our great gain.

Vladimir Nabokov (writer), Again, Russia's loss, our great gain.

George Balanchine (choreographer). Maria Tallchief is on the original list – so why not Balanchine?

Al Jolson (singer). How could he have been left out?

Eddie Cantor (singer and actor). Same question.

John Marshall (Supreme Court Justice). How was the father of Judicial Review overlooked? *Marbury v. Madison*. "It is a Constitution we are expounding."

Paul Freund (law professor).

Felix Frankfurter (law professor, Supreme Court Justice).

Earl Warren (Chief Justice of the Supreme Court).

Oliver Wendell Holmes (Supreme Court Justice)

Walker Evans (photojournalist of Depression-era America).

James Agee (writer). *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*, about the Depression. Died at 45.

Enrico Fermi (physicist). Manhattan Project. Italy's loss, our gain.

Jimmy Durante (actor, singer). "Good night, Mrs. Calabash, wherever you are." One of the best.

Fiorello La Guardia (politician). Mayor of NYC. Raided slot machine parlors. Read the funnies over the radio to NYC children, when there was a newspaper strike.

Oskar Morgenstern (mathematician, economist) should be allowed to join the polymath John von Neumann, who is on the list, and with whom he collaborated on game theory.

William Jennings Bryan ("Cross of Gold" speech, an important political figure during the Mauve Decade).

Horace Greeley (editor).

John Huston (film director). *The Maltese Falcon*, *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre*.

Orson Welles (film director, actor). *The War of the Worlds*, *Citizen Kane*, *The Third Man*.

Charlie Chaplin (actor). He wasn't on the original list. For god's sake.

Buster Keaton (comic).

Stanley Kubrick (movie director). *Dr. Strangelove*, *2001: A Space Odyssey*, *The Shining*.

Preston Sturges (movie director, screenwriter). *Sullivan's Travels*, *The Great McGinty*.

Groucho, Harpo, Chico Marx (comedic actors). What age last decided to leave them off the list?

Walter Reuther (head of the C.I.O., organized auto strikes).

David Dubinsky (the head of the ILGWU).

Helen Frankenthaler (artist).

Mark Rothko (painter).

Jackson Pollock (painter).

Edward Hicks (over 100 versions of "The Peaceable Kingdom").

Fats Waller ("Ain't Misbehavin'," "Honeysuckle Rose").

Edward G. Robinson (actor).

Claude Rains (actor).

Gary Cooper (actor).

Alexander Calder (artist, mobile-maker).

Wallace Stevens (poet and insurance executive). *Peter Quince At the Clavier*.

Lyndon Johnson (President). Civil rights legislation.

John C. Fremont (explorer and first Republican Presidential candidate).

Pierre and Jean Lafitte (pirates, but they helped defend New Orleans from the British in the War of 1812, winning the praise of General Andrew Jackson).

Ted Williams (Babe Ruth but no Ted Williams? See Updike's "Hub Fans Bid Kid Adieu").

John Updike (novelist).

J. D. Salinger (novelist and short-story writer). *The Catcher in the Rye*. The Glass Family stories. "Seymour....is he never wrong?"

John Cheever (novelist and short story writer). *The Wapshot*

Chronicle, The Wapshot Scandal.

Virginia Dare (first European child born in North America).

Henry Jackson (one of America's greatest Senators. Author of the Jackson-Vanik Amendment. Died of a heart attack on the evening of the day he learned that a Soviet Mig-23 had shot down a Korean Airlines passenger plane that had strayed into Soviet air space.

Robert Fitzgerald (unsurpassed translator of *Odyssey* and *Iliad*, alas, no relation).

Richard Wilbur (poet and translator).

Sammy Davis Jr. (entertainer, hooper). Another twofer: black and Jewish.

William Maxwell (novelist and editor).

Jacob Riis (*How The Other Half Lives*). Social reformer, photojournalist.

Leo Szilard (physicist, much-patented). Hungary's loss, our gain.

Robert Oppenheimer (physicist).

H.L. Mencken, journalist and writer ("The American Language").

Noah Webster (lexicographer). How was he left out?

Richard Rodgers (composer).

Oscar Hammerstein (lyricist).

Lorenz Hart (lyricist).

Frank Loesser (songwriter). *Guys and Dolls*.

Damon Runyon (writer).

Perry Miller (historian of pre-Civil War America).

Bunny Berigan (trumpeter). "I Can't Get Started."

Bix Beiderbecke (trumpeter). The "young man with a horn." Died at 28.

Sam Rayburn (Speaker of the House, formed with fellow Texas Senator Lyndon Johnson, a terrific legislative team).

George Meany (head of the A.F.L. for many decades).

Kurt Godel (logician, mathematician, analytic philosopher). Starved himself to death.

W. V. Quine (logician, philosopher).

Billy Wilder (director). *Some Like It Hot*, *The Apartment*, with longtime collaborator I.A.L. (Inter-City Algebra League) Diamond.

Ethel Waters (singer). For god's sake, how was she left out?

Walker Percy (novelist). *The Moviegoer*: "the horizontal and the vertical search."

Nathanael West (writer), *Miss Lonelyhearts*, *The Day of the Locust*. Died at 37 in a car crash. Brother-in-law of S. J. Perelman.

S. J. Perelman (humorist).

William Lloyd Garrison (journalist, abolitionist, suffragist, social reformer).

There were four people I left off my list because something about them repelled me. First, Louis Agassiz, for his belief, despite all the contrary evidence presented to him, in polygenism and the race theories to which that gave rise. Second, Bing Crosby, who abused – beat up – his children, two of whom later committed suicide. Third, Ezra Pound, who was an

antisemite, fascist, and traitor, who made propaganda broadcasts, hair-raisingly antisemitic, full of praise for Hitler and Mussolini, during World War II. After the war, to avoid being brought to trial for treason, he feigned mental illness. The study by Dr. E. Fuller Torrey, a psychiatrist who had access to the 12 years of Pound's medical records at St. Elizabeth's Hospital, presents overwhelming evidence that Pound was faking his mental illness, aided and abetted by some members of the hospital staff. Fourth, Noam Chomsky, for his leftward lunacy, his praise of Cuban, Nicaraguan, and – for a time – Venezuelan dictators, and his deep hostility to Israel.

Perhaps you'd like to create your own list of Overlooked Worthies. If so, please post your suggestions below. I'd love to learn more about those whom both I, and the U.S. government, have overlooked.

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