

Why Philadelphia?

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Black History and Conservative Principles
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Hi, My name is Bill Campbell. I am not now, nor have I ever been, Mayor of Atlanta. My job is to welcome you to the great city of Philadelphia, the home of such great persons as Absalom Jones, Richard Allen, Benjamin Rush, Anthony Benezet, John Woolman, Bishop William White, and William Sills in the 18th and 19th centuries. The birthplace of Jay Parker, Walter Williams, Clarence Thomas, and Bill Cosby in the 20th century, and the continued namesake of The Philadelphia Society in the 21st century.

But why discuss black history and conservative principles?

When Prince Kropotkin, the Russian anarchist, was told that American Negroes had a conservative leader—one Booker T. Washington—he replied: "And what do they have to conserve?" This bitter and ironic question has a good answer which can mostly be traced to the city in which we meet.

Black Americans, as well as white Americans, have quite a lot to conserve: the words of the Declaration of Independence, with their universal promise; the rule of law provided by the Constitution and the Bill of Rights; economic opportunity provided by a market economy, as well as the real wealth which has already been accumulated. The emphasis of conservatives on family and personal virtue is connected with our Judeo-Christian religious roots.

Nat Hentoff reminded us in yesterday's *Wall Street Journal* that Ralph Ellison when confronted by a young black student with a similar question, replied, "We do have institutions. We have the Constitution and the Bill of Rights. And we have jazz."

Russell Kirk, the godfather of conservatism, used the device of five cities--Jerusalem, Athens, Rome, London, and Philadelphia--to trace the development of the unique institutions of western civilization. Philadelphia is really the culmination of them all, particularly for the 75 years from 1750-1825 in which both whites and blacks birthed our earliest and most neglected civil rights movements.

The links between London and Philadelphia are written all over the city. The Christ Church Magna Carta windows links together Runnymede with Bishop William White and the First Prayer in the Continental Congress. The connections between William Wilberforce, Thomas Clarkson, and Charles James Fox and the anti-slavery movements in Philadelphia were strong and enshrined in the names of

their societies, schools, and colleges. The Quaker movements in England were strengthened with the Quaker stands in Pennsylvania.

We shall see whether Walter Williams agrees with one of his heroes as well as the hero of many in The Philadelphia Society, Adam Smith, who stated that, "The late resolution of the Quakers in Pennsylvania to set at liberty all their negro slaves, may satisfy us that their number cannot be very great. Had they made any considerable part of their property, such a resolution could never have been agreed to." (*Wealth of Nations*, p. 388)

In yesterday's *Wall Street Journal* Nat Hentoff was lamenting the fact that young blacks did not know Charlie Parker, nor even more astounding, Duke Ellington. But how many blacks, young or old, have ever heard of Absalom Jones and Richard Allen?

In the spirit of the great Gospel singer, Mahalia Jackson, we shall see Absalom Jones, the first black Episcopal priest in the United States, walking straight from Jerusalem to Philadelphia. Out of the great Christ Church here in Philadelphia, he was ordained by Bishop William White and founded the St. Thomas African Episcopal Church, still located here in Philadelphia and worth a visit.

He could say at the same time "how hateful slavery is in the sight of that God, who hath destroyed kings and princes, for their oppression of the poor slaves" and, at the same time observe, "we freely confess the vile habits often acquired in a state of servitude, are not easily thrown off; the example of the Israelites shews, who with all that Moses could do to reclaim them from it, still continued in their former habits more or less; and why will you look for better from us? Why will you look for grapes from thorns, or figs from thistles? It is in our posterity enjoying the same privileges with your own, that you ought to look for better things."

One of our speakers, Walter Williams was born in Philadelphia, North Philadelphia, to be exact. He grew up in the projects, the Richard Allen housing projects to be exact. Who was Richard Allen? He was the founder of Mother Bethel Church and the African Methodist Episcopal Church. He exemplified the reconciliation of American and African-American worldviews by his respect for Bishop Asbury, his personal piety, and his love of community.

Working together with Jones they founded the Free African Society in 1787. This was one of the earliest faith-based organizations to bring together Christianity, self-help, and solid economic entrepreneurial behavior. What better way to introduce the reception for Barbara Elliott's new book, *Street Saints*? She is releasing her book for the first time at this meeting and there will be a book signing immediately after this session. You will get a chance to hear Barb tomorrow afternoon.

Richard Allen's described his life of slavery as "poor, wretched and undone." By his own account he was "lost." These words mirror the words of "Amazing Grace." I will conclude this welcome with an invocation that uses the lyrics for "Amazing grace! How sweet the sound" by John Newton, the former slaver who became an Episcopal priest and had such a big influence on the British anti-slave trade reformers such as Thomas Clarkson and William Wilberforce:

Amazing Grace! How Sweet the Sound
That saved a wretch like me!
I once was lost, but now am found;
Was blind, but now I see.

'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear,

And grace my fears relieved;
How precious did that grace appear
The hour I first believed.

Through many dangers, toils and snares,
I have already come;
'Tis grace hath brought me safe thus far,
And grace will lead me home.

The Lord has promised good to me,
His Word my hope secures;
He will my Shield and Portion be,
As long as life endures.

Yea, when this flesh and heart shall fail,
And mortal life shall cease,
I shall possess, within the veil,
A life of joy and peace.

The earth shall soon dissolve like snow,
The sun forbear to shine;
But God, Who called me here below,
Shall be forever mine.

When we've been there ten thousand years,
Bright shining as the sun,
We've no less days to sing God's praise
Than when we'd first begun.

Amen.

Enjoy your food for the body to nourish your mind and spirit as we begin this incredible weekend.