**Schapiro: A lesson for Virginia from a pandemic past**

State unprepared then. Now?

The 1918-19 Spanish flu outbreak brought into sharp focus a state government unprepared for a health disaster.

More than 100 years ago - with the nation at war and Virginia under a new governor - lethal influenza swept across the state, sickening more than 326,000 people and killing nearly 16,000, most of them over two months.

The Spanish flu pandemic of 1918-19 eased long enough, in the estimate of authorities ultimately proved wrong by a second burst of sickness, for Virginia to hold an election - and for voters to do, as they usually did in that era: obediently affirm the conservative, white-male status quo.

They re-elected the Democratic boss, U.S. Sen. Tom Martin - predecessor to the maximum leader, Harry Byrd Sr. - and all 10 members of the House delegation. That included one Republican, from Southwest Virginia, then a hotbed of competitive politics.

His name, venerated in the remote region's hills and hollows, could have been lifted from a Coen brothers film: C. Bascom Slemp.

The enduring predictability of Virginia politics might have been a distraction from the deadly predictability of the pandemic, which raged as World War I was winding down.

The flu first took root in Virginia in September 1918 at what is now known as Fort Lee, outside Petersburg, where a soldier transferred from Massachusetts - an early epicenter for the illness - brought with him what was then known as la grippe.

And over the next two months, as thousands suffered and succumbed, it brought into sharp focus a state government unprepared for a health disaster of this scale.

Part of the problem was disbelief - that the outbreak would divert attention from the war effort, never mind that the military was contributing to the spread of Spanish flu by clustering large numbers of fighting men at posts such as Camp Lee, notes historian Nelson Lankford, retired editor of the Virginia Magazine of History and Biography.

Part of the problem was structural - that Virginia lacked a muscular health bureaucracy, even as its governor, Westmoreland Davis (like the current governor, a VMI guy), prepared to put in place a two-year, executive-proposed budget scheme still used a century later.

Long before it employed more than 100,000 to serve nearly 8.5 million, most of whom live in cities and suburbs, Virginia government was a lean cabal of parsimonious Mandarins who worried that too many public services would agitate taxpayers to demand more.

And that would threaten the oligarchy that controlled the mostly rural state of then-2.2 million people.

In Virginia, the response to the Spanish flu epidemic was a patchwork. On the public side: federal, state and local government, each backfilling the other. On the private side: the Red Cross and the Anti-Tuberculosis Association, supplementing an overwhelmed government.

Bans on public gatherings - the social distancing of the day - were uneven.

The State Fair of Virginia, staged in Richmond not far from what has become toney Scott's Addition, continued with one restriction: Indoor sideshows were dropped.

A man in Jonesville complained in a letter to Davis that was unfair to local fairs, a number of which were canceled, according to a 2002 master's thesis on the pandemic by a student at the University of Richmond, Stephanie Forrest Barker.

As the enormity of the crisis emerged - with staggering rates of illness and death, particularly in Richmond, where 808 died in the first outbreak - temporary hospitals were fashioned from shuttered schools. Because of Jim Crow, blacks and whites were treated in separate hospitals.

Nearly 102 years later, at the right hand of Gov. Ralph Northam - himself a doctor - is an African American physician, Norm Oliver. He is helping guide the state's response to COVID-19 as health commissioner, one whose specialty is racial disparity in health care.

In Richmond, the temporary hospitals - set up almost overnight - helped slow the spread of infection. Their staffs included medical students and volunteers prominent in other fields: Marguerite Davis, the commonwealth's first lady, and Maggie Walker, the first lady of black commerce.

By the end of October, it appeared the worst had passed. On Nov. 3, 1918, two days before the election and eight ahead of the armistice that ended World War I, Virginians got the all-clear.

It was too much, too soon. A second torrent of flu roiled the state before ebbing in February 1919.

A treatment debated during the pandemic that might have done more for the psyche than the respiratory system was whiskey. It was out of reach for many because the state had enacted Prohibition in 1916.

Davis ignored appeals to loosen up the liquor supply. Confiscated booze was occasionally turned over to hospitals and pharmacists, who would honor a doctor's prescriptions for spirits.

The Northam administration on Friday wrote a different kind of prescription - one that might help save some restaurants from economic aftershocks of the coronavirus: Allowing those with liquor licenses to sell wine and beer to go.

Contact Jeff E. Schapiro at (804) 649-6814 or jschapiro@timesdispatch.com. Listen to his podcast, Capitol Chat, on Richmond.com. Follow him on Facebook and Twitter, @RTDSchapiro. Listen to his analysis 8:45 a.m. Friday on VPM News, 88.9 FM.

**Schapiro: Scars upon scars - graffiti alters monuments' narrative**

This urgent prose, in overlapping colors, is creating a powerful new narrative about the statues, immediately transforming them from symbols of white supremacy to scars of racial inequity.

Angela Howard, a hairdresser in her native Henrico County, carefully clambered over the massive base of the towering likeness of Robert E. Lee on Monument Avenue, pausing to read the dense quilt of spray-painted graffiti that had appeared on the Confederate statute and three others in the tense days immediately following George Floyd's death in Minneapolis.

"I can appreciate history," said Howard, who is African American and of a mixed mind about removing the statues, an option for local government under a new Virginia law that takes effect July 1 and does not apply to state-owned Lee. "It's not all pretty."

The handiwork of protesters, the graffiti included four-letter epithets, many a response to police violence. From statue to statue, there was a sameness to the graffiti: "AmeriKKKa," "Civil Rights 4 All," "Lynch Trump," "Freedom," "Black Power" and "Kill Racism."

This urgent prose, in overlapping colors, is creating a powerful new narrative about the statues, immediately transforming them from symbols of white supremacy to scars of racial inequity.

And it is providing a compelling argument not only to preserve these statues where they stand, but the graffiti that declares in no uncertain terms what this 19th-century and early 20th-century iconography was always intended to convey and that Richmond must never forget:

That hostility for people of color, their supposed liberation after four years of civil war notwithstanding, would be given new legitimacy by repackaging the South's defeat as a principled setback - the so-called Lost Cause - for a high-minded white oligarchy that, in effect, would re-enslave blacks through segregation and its many forms.

Such spin would be carried out over decades by organizations such as the United Daughters of the Confederacy, whose marble-skinned headquarters on Arthur Ashe Boulevard - renamed a year ago for the black tennis great who quit the city, furious over its racism - was tagged with graffiti and set on fire by protesters.

"The graffiti is an implicit acknowledgement that there is something wrong with the Lost Cause," said Julian Hayter, a civil rights historian at the University of Richmond and member of the mayoral commission that - post-Charlottesville, but pre-George Floyd - recommended keeping most of the Confederate monuments while pairing them with signage that gives their warts-and-all story.

In a word oft used in 21st-century appraisals of the past: that Lee, J.E.B. Stuart, Jefferson Davis, whose likeness the commission said should be removed, Stonewall Jackson and Matthew Fontaine Maury should be contextualized.

And they were by graffiti artists whose raw craft is a reminder that over thousands of years etchings, drawings, carvings and notes - in caves, on the walls of ancient cities, the facades of churches, and distant battlements - were a form of protest by those ignored, oppressed and demeaned.

"My wife woke up this morning and said, 'These statues have been recontextualized'," said Hayter, who as a historian believes the monuments should remain where they are, but as an African American is pained by what they symbolize.

Troubling emblems - and the lessons they carry - rely on public memory. In some instances, that requires the preservation of such emblems, helping nurture what Hayter describes as a "counter-narrative."

That Auschwitz, the sprawling Nazi death camp in Poland, still stands is intended as a constant reminder of an unmatched manifestation of anti-Semitism. Vienna, in Austria, and Prague, capital of the Czech Republic, preserve Soviet statuary as testimony to Moscow's cruel socialist hand in shaping these cities in the wake of World War II.

Richmond's Confederate statutes, retold through mass-scale vandalism, could serve the same role, perhaps spurring the city's leadership to reconsider plans to remove the graffiti, as it has reflexively done for years after occasional, here-and-there damage.

But it is difficult to imagine that events of the past week will not intensify demands to remove the statues once and for all, never mind that Richmond has quietly entered a period of what might be described as monumental parity.

Bill Martin, director of The Valentine, a museum that focuses entirely on Richmond's history, said that roughly a dozen statues have been erected over the past two decades, nearly all of them tributes to the long-overlooked: minorities and women. That's almost equal to the number of monuments that went up during the Jim Crow era in homage to the deities of the Old South.

Martin, who would like to see the soiled statues scrubbed clean, said a visual record of the graffiti is essential. And, referring to a recent exhibit at The Valentine on the monuments, he says that they will be reinterpreted by future generations, much as they were over several days of agitated protest.

"Are we seeing the emergence of that narrative in Richmond this past weekend, the emergence of a narrative that has been trying to establish itself forever?" said Martin.

It's as plain as the paint on the Lee monument.

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**Schapiro: Getting the last laugh - 56 years later**

The Congressional Record notes that laughter rippled through the U.S. House chamber when in 1964 a wily, 80-year-old Virginia congressman proposed adding one word - sex - to landmark civil rights legislation for which he and his fellow Southerners had no use.

"What harm will this do to the condition of the bill?" asked the congressman, Howard W. Smith, then chairman of the influential House Rules Committee - a post through which he could control the ebb and flow of legislation, killing any measure to which he was hostile.

And the pipe-puffing Smith would do so with nary a word, sometimes by retreating to his farm in Fauquier County when he was supposed to be in Washington reviewing bills with his committee.

"Some of the bills would fall out of his pocket when he was bending over to milk the cows," said Tony Troy, a lawyer-lobbyist who learned of Smith's procedural prowess in the mid-1960s as a just-out-of-law-school hire in a Virginia attorney general's office run by remnants of the segregationist Democratic machine of which Smith was a pillar.

Smith's amendment survived, ensuring the Civil Rights Act of 1964 would prohibit discrimination on the basis of race, color, religion, national origin - and sex.

Some viewed Smith's proposal as an attempt to sabotage the bill, burdening it with specious legalese. Others said it was a prescient step toward women's equality.

Still others contended Smith had a narrow purpose: to protect white women, an important source of cheap labor in Southern textile factories, with an impediment that might have managers thinking twice about hiring African Americans.

On June 15, nearly six decades after the act became law, the U.S. Supreme Court decided that one word - sex - applied not just to gender but to gay, lesbian and transgender Americans, guaranteeing they, too, are protected against discrimination in the workplace.

Decried by the right, welcomed by the left, the ruling is a reminder of a constant in the law: that words have power and such power can be diminished or - in this instance - increased by events unforeseen when those words were melded into law.

"The law hasn't changed, but our understanding of how the law is applied has changed because we are living a more informed life," said Claire Guthrie Gastañaga, a former chief deputy attorney general - the first woman to hold the position -who has lobbied for the American Civil Liberties Union and Equality Virginia, a gay-rights organization.

Virginia's journey on gay and transgender rights has, over the past 20 years, been one of resistance, punctuated by progress, followed by accelerating advances fueled by the state's increasing diversity and the growing influence of younger voters.

Two Democratic governors, Mark Warner and Tim Kaine, signed executive orders shielding gay and transgender state employees from bias on the job. A Republican governor, Bob McDonnell, refused to extend the order, saying it had no basis in law. His Democratic successor, Terry McAuliffe, reinstated the order.

Virginians overwhelmingly approved a constitutional amendment in 2006 banning same-sex marriage. When it was ruled unconstitutional bya federal judge in Norfolk eight years later - the U.S. Supreme Court would throw out all restrictions in 2015 - polls showed voters' views had flipped in favor of allowing same-sex marriage.

This year, with Democrats again controlling the General Assembly, Virginia became the first state in the South to prohibit discrimination against gay and transgender people in employment, housing and public accommodation.

Virginia is among 23 states to adopt such protections, complementing the federal law on which the Supreme Court recently ruled.

Smith - known as the Judge, a bow to his years as a state jurist - never concealed his views on race, nationality and labor, winning legislation during World War II that made it easier to prosecute foreign-born residents for subversive activities and tougher for unions to advocate for workers.

So his tweak to the Civil Rights Act of 1964 seemed consistent with his long record as an obstructionist and master of process. But Smith would insist he was standing with women's groups in Virginia that favored what we know as the Equal Rights Amendment, itself finally approved here this year.

But in 1966, running for re-election to the seat he had first won in 1930, Smith was viewed by Democratic primary voters as an emblem of inequality. His district had been reconfigured the previous year to include a chunk of Fairfax County, then beginning to brim with moderate suburban voters.

A challenge by an enthusiastic liberal, George Rawlings, led to the seemingly unthinkable: Smith's defeat. And though the seat would go Republican, Rawlings' victory - years before he would come out as gay - would augur the full-on cross-pollination of state and national Democratic politics playing out these days in the suburbs, the statehouse and the streets.

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