

Pride and Prejudice



Editor's note: This is a special guest op-ed from BernardGoldberg.com Premium Member, Michael G. Frankel.

The beauty of words is their power to succinctly convey deep feelings and emotions. Professional writers labor over the use of a particular word or phrase. George Will is a master in this regard. When you read one of his articles, you can tell that he has carefully chosen a certain word or phrase to make the reader fully appreciate the point he is trying to make.

Unfortunately, in our brave new world of sound bites, acronyms, and emojis, the craftsmanship of words and writing all too often has been decimated in the quest for speed and brevity of expression. More depressingly, some words are used without that much thought or feeling. This is true in both the personal and political arenas.

One of the words that has been overused and lost some of its importance and power is the word "love." The phrase "I love you" has become used very cavalierly during the past decade. Its usage has become ubiquitous, which has diminished the

depth and specialness of its meaning. This possibly began in 1977 when Milton Glasser coined the phrase, "I Love NY," which in 2009 became the official slogan of the State of New York. Now we have the heart symbol pretty much everywhere to demonstrate how much everyone loves everything.

Accordingly, the expression of love has become depersonalized and banal. By specific illustration, the expression of one's "love for America," has become somewhat superficial and trite. This has relevance when we try to discern how someone seeking political office feels about our country. Perhaps a more accurate reflection of one's attitude about America can best be gleaned by inquiring, "Are you proud to be an American" rather than, "Do you love America?"

In contrast to love (which is a gut emotional feeling), pride requires something more than mere emotion. It is a given that parents will love their child. It is not a given that parents will or should have pride in their children. Pride typically requires thinking and reasoning. When politicians are asked, "Are you proud to be an American," they will not be able to give the knee jerk answer, "Of course I am," because they will then be forced to explain why they are proud, and more importantly how the reasons given for their purported pride can be reconciled with their negative views of America with respect to a number of issues, most notably that of race in America.

And that leads us to the word "prejudice," a prevalent term used in the 1960s to indicate that one was not a "bigot." The words "prejudice" and "bigot" have become relics of linguistic history, as they are no longer strong enough for today's social justice warriors who need to prove their bona fides and the strength of their convictions. Thus, whereas in the old days, one was labelled a bigot or prejudiced to make it clear that they were unworthy of societal respect, eventually these words were deemed insufficient to make clear how truly evil and hateful the target of scorn really was. And

those benign terms were replaced first by the term "racist," and more recently by the term "white supremacist." These terms of derision and disgust are now thrown around much like the word love, except that these derogatory words are used to access power through demagoguery and to discourage dissent.

The point of all this is that words matter, and people, especially politicians (and the media) need to be held accountable for what they say and write and be compelled to tell us how they really feel about issues that are important to millions of us. One of those issues is pride in America. This is not about blind pride or an attitude of "America: Love it or Leave it;" but rather a balanced view of the history of our country and the pride that millions of us take in all that America is and has done for almost two and a half centuries.

One of the beautiful things about America is that no one is forced to love her or be a proud American, and, in fact, they can shout from the rooftops their disdain for America if they so choose, and without fear of retribution. But one cannot have it both ways: if you constantly attack American values and American traditions and history, and believe that "America was never really that great to begin with," can you also be proud to *be* an American?

We all know the answer to that question.