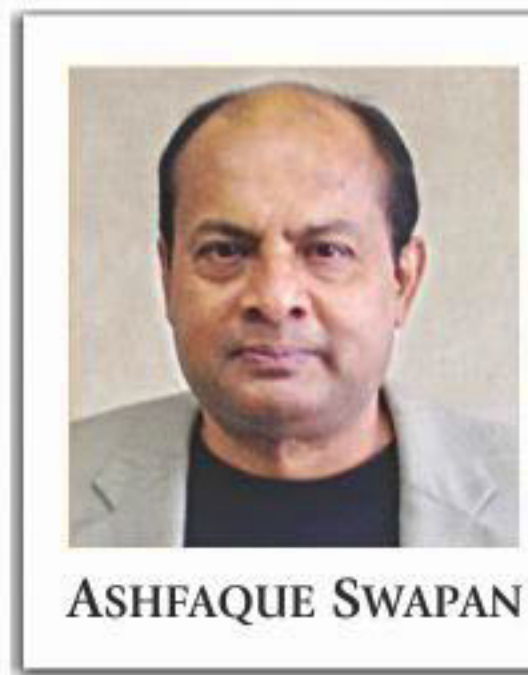


A haunting, sombre memorial to African-American suffering



"And O my people, out yonder, hear me, they do not love your neck unmoosed and straight. So love your neck; put a hand on it, grace it, stroke it and hold it up. and all your inside parts that they'd just as soon slop for hogs, you got to love them. The dark, dark liver—love it, love it and the beat and beating heart, love that too. More than eyes or feet. More than lungs that have yet to draw free air. More than your life-holding womb and your life-giving private parts, hear me now, love your heart. For this is the prize."

--Nobel laureate author Toni Morrison at the National Memorial for Peace and Justice in Montgomery, Alabama.

It was a lovely spring morning when my friend Arif and I drove down to Montgomery, Alabama. A new memorial, National Memorial for Peace and Justice, opened here on April 24—dedicated to African Americans who had been the victims of extrajudicial killings in the post-Civil War United States.

This beautiful, dignified memorial is impossible to visit without being shaken at the cruelty visited upon African Americans. The sheer statistics are mind-boggling: Around 12 million Africans were kidnapped, enslaved and brought to the United States, and the journey was so perilous that two million died along the way.

However, this museum's main focus is on something more recent, but no less harrowing: lynching. Lynching is the practice of killing a person without any judicial process by individuals or a community who arbitrarily decide the punishment.

One realises that as egregious as the human capacity for oppression is, the ability to be in denial about outrageous barbarity seems just as unconscionable.

A tendency to airbrush history has resulted in a penchant for ignoring the horrors visited upon African Americans after emancipation. The museum notes

that from 1877 to 1950, over 4,400 lynchings of African Americans have been documented. This happened in front of people ranging from two to 10,000. These extrajudicial murders happened in broad daylight, often in front of crowds.

While lynching was not unheard of in the frontier region of the American West, what's remarkable is that the lynching in the South that targeted African Americans happened in communities with fully functioning courts.

Black people were lynched by hanging, drowning, shooting, beating, burning or stabbing. They could be killed for economic success, political organising, or for reasons as flimsy as failing to address a white person as "sir."

Blacks had nowhere to go—the US Supreme Court's rulings provided support to white racists; the federal

government essentially washed its hands after repeated efforts to pass anti-lynching laws failed after recalcitrant Southern lawmakers balked. In a word, a complete meltdown of social justice.

The memorial leads visitors through a series of informative banners. There is little need for embellishment because the facts are shocking enough. Visitors pass by a set of sculptures that are heart-breaking to see. These remarkably vivid sculptures capture the fear and pain of enslaved human beings who can be tortured at the whim of a white master or overseer.

Visitors are then led into a memorial area where rows of six-foot-long metallic boxes stand. Each box represents a county in the (mainly Southern) United States. On each box, names of lynching victims are engraved. Many names are not known—there it's just mentioned that the name of the victim is unknown.

Equal Justice Initiative, the nonprofit advocacy organisation that built the museum, did meticulous research to document the number and identity of lynching victims. The museum says—with considerable justification—that slavery never really went away; it just evolved. Between 1910 and 1970, six million blacks fled the South to escape the terrible racial injustice and violence of the region.

At the museum, visitors gently descend along a declining floor, but the coffin-like boxes commemorating lynching victims are at the same level. As we went further and further down, the coffin-like structures we looked down at earlier are suspended from a high ceiling. It's as if the spirits are gradually soaring.

On the walls, informative banners give a sense of the intense atmosphere of racist violence of that era. "Seven

black people were lynched near Screamer, Alabama, in 1888 for drinking from a white man's well," one banner informs.

"Lynchings in America were not isolated hate crimes committed by rogue vigilantes," the museum declares. "Lynchings were targeted racial violence perpetrated to uphold an unjust social order. Lynchings were terrorism."

Visitors finally descend into a sort of basement level, where water runs down a wall, adding a soothing noise to a dark and cosy area. On that wall is the poignant inscription: "Thousands of African Americans are unknown victims of racial terror, whose deaths cannot be documented, many whose names will never be known. They are all honored here."

A garden and gentle, undulating waves of a grassy knoll outside make the memorial a place for gentle, sombre reflection—a place for a wrenching contemplation of man's inhumanity to man.

It is remarkable how extraordinarily well the entire project was executed. Surrounded by well-sculpted and well-tended greens, the architectural structure is also impressive and deeply affecting.

What impressed me most, however, is the overall tone of the museum.

Notwithstanding the pain and sadness, organisers are nevertheless firmly anchored in all the factual information they have mustered. Nobody is ever vicious or vindictive, though Lord knows there is enough provocation. This serene yet determined tone is best epitomised by the moving message as the visit ends:

"For the hanged and the beaten/For the shot, drowned, and burned/ For the tortured, tormented, and terrorized/ For those abandoned by the rule of law, "We will remember."

"With hope because hopelessness is the enemy of justice/ With courage because peace requires bravery/ With persistence because justice is a constant struggle/ With faith because we shall overcome."

Ashfaque Swapan is a contributing editor for Silicooner, a monthly periodical for South Asians in the United States.



PHOTO: ASHFAQUE SWAPAN

A sculpture of a slave at the National Memorial for Peace and Justice in Montgomery, Alabama. The memorial is dedicated to the egregious injustice faced by African Americans after emancipation, with a particular focus on the barbaric practice of lynching, where African Americans were murdered without any judicial recourse.

PROJECT ■ SYNDICATE

How Europe can save the Iran nuclear deal



This week, a senior German official pointed out to me that, "The Iran nuclear deal is the last firewall preventing

in the world's most combustible region from spilling over into thermonuclear war." That language is unusually apocalyptic, but it reflects a genuine fear that US President Donald Trump could soon dismantle a crucial line of defence that Germans and other Europeans are proud to have built.

European leaders have been on the back foot since January, when Trump gave them a deadline of May 12th to "fix the terrible flaws of the Iran nuclear deal," or he would re-impose sanctions on Iran. Trump's main objections to the deal are that it does not address Iran's misbehaviour in the region or its ballistic missile programme, nor does it prevent Iran from restarting its nuclear programme after 2025. And now that Trump has

installed a hawkish new foreign-policy team—with John Bolton as national security adviser and Mike Pompeo as secretary of state—European diplomats fear the worst.

Over the past few months, the German, French, and British governments have been frantically assembling a package of measures—including potential sanctions on Iranian elites—to address Trump's concerns. And both French President Emmanuel Macron and German Chancellor Angela Merkel have now visited the White House to persuade Trump that it is better to build on the deal than blow it up.

In the short term, the Europeans are hoping that their proposed measures will allow Trump to declare victory while remaining in the deal. They have reminded Trump that a diplomatic solution to the North Korea nuclear crisis could very well depend on whether he unilaterally abandons America's commitments to Iran under the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA).

In the long term, though, European leaders' ability to save the deal will

depend on the extent to which they can act in their own interests, rather than being a hostage to the caprices of the Trump administration.

It is fitting that the Iran issue has come to the fore around the 15th anniversary of the start of the Iraq War. For European diplomats, that disaster and the success of the JCPOA have come to represent two foreign-policy extremes. Iraq was post-Cold War Europe's darkest hour, with European countries lined up against one another to support or oppose the war, even though none had any real influence over US decisions.

The JCPOA, by contrast, is seen as modern Europe's shining success. Desperate to avoid another war in the Middle East, Europeans, starting in 2005, began to define their own interests in the region. With the two-pronged goal of preventing Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons and avoiding another war, they devised various carrots and sticks to shape Iranian and US actions.

To Iran, European diplomats offered a choice between two futures: one in which Iran would freeze its nuclear programme and end its

international isolation; and one in which it would maintain its programme and face ever-harsher sanctions, and possibly war. At the same time, the Europeans, having convinced Russia and China to back their strategy, approached the US with another stark choice: either join an international coalition to apply diplomatic pressure on Iran, or pursue dubiously effective military measures on your own.

Today, European leaders' overarching goals in the Middle East are to de-escalate the hegemonic struggle between Iran and Saudi Arabia, prevent nuclear proliferation, combat terrorism, and stanch the flow of refugees into Europe. But many of these goals are now being actively undermined by the Trump administration, which has made a show of siding with Israel and Saudi Arabia against Iran in regional conflicts from Yemen and Iraq to Lebanon and Syria.

Diplomats in some EU member states have started to worry that attempts to placate Trump could force them into self-defeating positions, thus reprising the relationship

between British Prime Minister Tony Blair and US President George W Bush in 2003. As one official confided to me, the introduction of new sanctions will make it even harder to keep Iran committed to the JCPOA, let alone engage with it on other regional issues.

Nevertheless, the European approach so far has been carefully calibrated both to win over Trump and preserve Iran's commitment to the deal. Needless to say, this requires a delicate balance. If the Europeans give Trump too much, they will be playing into the hands of US hardliners.

At the same time, they will be empowering the hardliners in Iran. In a recent interview, political scientist Nasser Hadian of Tehran University told me that moderate Iranian leaders such as President Hassan Rouhani and Foreign Minister Javad Zarif have already been left in a weak position, with hardliners now saying, "We told you so." In Hadian's view, the greatest danger is that Europe will try to appease Trump "at any cost," when it should be working "on a plan B to save the deal without the US."

Among other things, a plan B would offer Iran economic relief if the US were to re-impose sanctions, conditional on Iran's continued compliance with the JCPOA; and it would provide the basis for a larger strategy of engaging with Iran and other stakeholders to de-escalate regional conflicts. Of course, it would be better for everyone if Trump agrees not to abrogate the nuclear deal. But to persuade him of that, Europe must show that it is willing to go it alone.

To that end, Trump should be confronted with a clear choice: either preserve the JCPOA, in exchange for European support in addressing regional issues and Iran's missile programme; or scrap the deal and risk the loss of European cooperation and the emergence of a nuclear-armed Iran. As my German interlocutor put it, "Trump must be told that he cannot have his cake and eat it."

Mark Leonard is Director of the European Council on Foreign Relations.

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QUOTABLE
Quote

DESIDERIUS ERASMUS
Dutch Renaissance humanist, Catholic priest, and theologian

When I get a little money, I buy books; if any is left, I buy food and clothes.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

wake

7 Mythical giant

1 Tap

29 Oodles of

8 Just for fun

7 Exactly

33 Wading bird

9 Gives in

11 "The Raven"

34 Plantation

10 Insect section

lady

setting

16 Suit

12 Foot part

35 Freshener

18 Burgundy city

13 Mixed up

scent

20 Dodge, as duty

14 Folded food

36 Titled ones

22 Malevolent

15 Homeless

37 Guinness of

23 Chants

children

film

24 Neighbor of

16 Farm machine

38 Each

Botswana

17 Thick slice

39 Take ten

25 One of the

18 Reply to

40 Makes fun of

Magi

"Gracias"

DOWN

28 Put up

19 "In your

1 Picnic side

dreams!"

dishes

30 Wheel

21 King, in Latin

2 Organ part

connectors

22 Tomfoolery

3 Nepal neighbor

31 Flower girl,

often

25 Take in

4 Driver's place

32 Toadies' replies

26 Wee bit

5 Mine output

34 Inside info

27 Toward the

6 TV's Danson

36 D.C. baseballer

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YESTERDAY'S ANSWER

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TOTES

MAUDE

OPENS

PRYOR

NERDY

SCANS

BEETLE BAILEY

BY MORT WALKER

BABY BLUES

BY KIRKMAN & SCOTT