

WHO ARE WE?

Shakespeare, Bridger and our Greatest Generation.

By Chris Conrad

Eighty-two years ago on Dec. 7, 1941, in a barrage of aerial bombings that lasted only two hours the Japanese assaulted Pearl Harbor and began World War II in the Pacific. Following that bombardment America got up and went on to win a war that it didn't want or start. Some have called the Americans who fought that war "the greatest generation." It might be true. They didn't back down.

That's how wars are won.

But it started before WWII. America was built on it. It runs through civilizations and, at its best, becomes the backbone of great nations. It's called, "knowing who you are." It's the cord that binds us together. Those Americans who fought in WWII had it. So did the pioneers who came West, as did those who created our republic before them. No nation will long survive without it. The cord that had built the cathedrals of Europe before that had laid claim to the hearts of men wherever it was heard. It had transformed society throughout all of Europe and went on to create Western Civilization. Its message commanded its citizens to look higher. Even kings bent their knees to look up.

For this it has always had enemies. Greatness brings enemies. Always. Especially after victory. Our nation today is in the middle of a predictable but very different kind of war. It is a war that has largely been waged from within. It is a war for the heart and soul of our country. It began in earnest in the mid-'60s with the initial assaults of those who chose to magnify and condemn every defect in American life. With the help of a virulent Left, big media, big tech, big government, a brainless academia, and certainly assisted by the efforts of the global elite and the Chinese Communist Party, those condemnations have led to a sustained 60-year carpet bombing of every foundation stone upon which America was built. The consequences have been devastating.

We have become a country that seems to have been cast adrift. We won't stand our ground any longer. Intimidated by the invasion of "modern" thought, we now run to meet in the middle. That has been the most damaging hit of all. It undermines everything America ever stood for.

The mindless elevation of every viewpoint has, over time, resulted in chaos instead of harmony. And a slow and steady rot. Meeting stupid and insane ideas halfway has inevitably destroyed the very things the new tolerance pretended to protect. We no longer know who we are. The mighty sails that once drove our nation forward no longer hold wind. We drift listless in a sea of



Act IV. Sc. 7.

Henry V at the Battle of Agincourt in 1415. Illustration by Sir John Gilbert (1817-1897) from "The Globe Illustrated Shakespeare: The Complete Works Annotated," 1979.

**“Backbone” changes things.
It always has.
Courage is contagious.**



ABOVE: “The Stars and Stripes” is an iconic photograph of U.S. Marines raising the flag atop Mount Suribachi during the Battle of Iwo Jima in the final stages of the Pacific war. (Photo by Joe Rosenthal, Associated Press, Feb. 23, 1945.) BELOW: Jim Bridger is one of Gordon Punt’s many pen and ink drawings and posters of famous Old West American Indians, outlaws and interesting characters, like Chief Joseph, Sitting Bull, and Geromino.

putrid lies.

So how do we cure it? Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, the Russian dissident who spent 10 years in communist slave labor camps for criticizing Joseph Stalin, once wrote: “The simple step of a courageous individual is not to take part in the lie. One word of truth outweighs the world.” Defined simply, that is called “backbone.” It changes things. It always has. Courage is contagious.

We’re still drawn to stories of it, particularly of the American West. “High Noon” was a movie made about it, a good man alone on a dirt street facing the enemy. If one knows why he is alive, he is empowered to do great things. It defines every hero, living and dead.

Jim Bridger was one of them. The famous mountaineer was renowned throughout the American West for good reason. He stood upright. He was drawn to the truth. It made him the man he was. It was why he was



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universally trusted and respected.

A story about the famous mountaineer was once printed in the *Sheridan Post* in October 1911 which mentioned his love of William Shakespeare. It stated that Bridger “developed the most extravagant admiration for him. Jim hired a reader at \$50 per month and listened to Shakespeare every evening. All went well, until one night, as the reader came to the proposed murder of the princess in the tower from “Richard III.” Jim sprang from his seat, with blazing eyes, and yelled, in thundering tones, ‘Hold on there! Jest wait until I get my rifle and I’ll shoot the scoundrel!’ As one of his old pards remarked, sincerer compliment was never paid Shakespeare.”

Bridger knew. The truths of Western Civilization ran up his own backbone. He was fearless because he knew where he came from. That knowledge drew him to Shakespeare. That may be an improbable thing to many modern-day admirers of the American West, but that is only because they underestimate the reach of Shakespeare on the frontier. Bridger did not.

He knew there was a reason the great “Bard’s” works were often found next to Bibles in the covered wagons, packs, and camps of those who came West. Shakespeare’s works were reminders of all that was honorable in the civilization from which they came. He knew the noble truths that would give the warrior courage for whatever battle lay ahead. He knew where honor lay. He knew where victory was to be found, live or die, amidst the greatest struggles of life.

Nowhere may he have spelled that out more clearly than in his play “Henry V.” King Henry’s speech to his beleaguered troops on the morning of Oct. 25 (St. Crispin’s Day), 1415, rings as true today as when Shakespeare first penned the words over 400 years ago. (Henry V actually delivered a stirring speech to his disheartened and outnumbered troops prior to engaging the French army that morning in history. Shakespeare gives him words that might have truly been spoken to his army before it went on to seize one of the greatest victories in English history.) Henry’s troops were exhausted and felt heavily inferior in number to the opposing French forces. When Henry overhears his cousin lament that their own side is woefully outnumbered, he answers boldly:



William Shakespeare (1564-1616), aka The Bard, English playwright, poet and actor who lived in Stratford-upon-Avon in England. Mountain man Jim Bridger was a fan.

King Henry V

*“What’s he that wishes so
My cousin Westmoreland? No, my fair cousin....
If we are marked to die, we are enough
To do our country loss; and if to live,
The fewer men, the greater share of honour
God’s will! I pray thee, wish not one man more....
We would not die in that man’s company
That fears his fellowship to die with us.
This day is called the feast of Crispian:
He that outlives this day, and comes safe home,
Will stand a tiptoe when the day is named
And rouse him at the name of Crispian.
He that shall live this day, and live old age,
Will yearly on the vigil feast his neighbours,
And say “To-morrow is Saint Crispian.”
Then will he strip his sleeve and show his scars.
And say “These wounds I had on Crispin’s day....”
And Crispin Crispian shall ne’er go by,
From this day to the ending of the world,
But we in it shall be remember’d;
We few, we happy few, we band of brothers....
And gentlemen in England now a-bed
Shall think themselves accursed they were not
here,
And hold their manhoods cheap whiles any
speaks
That fought with us upon Saint Crispin’s day.”*

We can almost hear Jim Bridger stand up and cheer when those words were read to him on an evening far back on the American frontier. Bridger shared with Shakespeare a knowledge of the reason man is called to stand and fight the enemy. King Henry’s words are words for us today. A “St. Crispin’s Day” is truly here for us. America is in trouble. Our cities are in chaos, our borders are open, the rule of law is

being mocked, and a bloated and out-of-control federal government has become the enemy of all those who love what our country was founded upon. We are under siege. If we do not stand up in times like these, we will have failed in our mission. Our country as well as our own honor is at stake. Washington, D.C., has become a cesspool. They are not going to fix it for us. We must. One by one.

A nation cannot stand without a vision of the Good. Just like men. Even rough and illiterate frontiersmen like Jim Bridger saw it. It’s the cord that binds us together. And brings us the reason to stand upright. Fight will always disappear when the right ide is no longer pointed up. G.K. Chesterton, England’s great “Apostle of Common Sense,” once summed it up well: “When men choose not to believe in God, they do not thereafter believe in nothing, they then become capable of believing in anything.”

We are living through that today. The rejection of Truth has issued in degeneracy, chaos, and despair. And spineless, defeated men.

Truth exists. It lay the cord of Western Civilization. It is the foundation stone of America. It’s time to believe in it again. To stand for it. To fight for it. It’s a battle cry for all of us: Follow the Truth. When you do, incrementally the country will begin to change; you’ll find others at your side. Some things are worth dying for. Comfort and ease are not among them. When individuals know that they walk upright. When armies know that they win battles.

The gray zone is where nations fall. Just like men. All else is a pitiful delusion. Good cannot meet evil halfway without terrible consequences. Neither can the hearts of men.

Who are we? Henry V’s army gave a noble answer that shines in English history. We are on a different kind of battlefield today, but this is a day for us to do the same. America is worth fighting for. So is our own honor. When the vision of that is rekindled in America, we will see something powerful begin to rise up across our country. It’s the only way to fix this.

Our morning in history has arrived. There is a reason we are here: There is a battle to be won. Be part of it. ■

Chris Conrad is a California forester. Contact Chris.Conrad@mlode.com. Here’s Henry V’s speech: <https://youtu.be/A-yZNMWFqvM>.