

Getting Your Mail

"DO you know why Lincoln faces a different direction from those other guys?" the young clerk asks, pointing to the change he's heaped in my hand. Barely waiting for my "no," he replies didactically, "Because he's the only one who opposed slavery!"

"But, but ..."—butting a Roosevelt dime into view—I sputter about FDR serving decades after Lincoln, and the New Deal and World War II, while the clerk's expression morphs to the attentiveness of an iced halibut.

"OMG, not a history lesson," he surely dreads. Maybe you do, too.

Admittedly, the Fourth of July is an odd time to write about history—when you and I have far more important things to think about. Even when I've summoned up the rectitude to participate in a public reading of the Declaration of Independence, we reach "the pursuit of Happiness" and my mind exits the Second Continental Congress of 240 years ago and flees to Spec's, mentally picking out the holiday picnic brew.

Regardless, I *have* to write about history. I've been getting a lot of your mail recently, and it involves history. I need to forward it along.

The State Bar's Law-Related Education Department, or LRE, and its subsidiary, Law Focused Education Inc., provide an astonishing sweep of resources to improve the history and civics education of Texas elementary, middle, and high school students. These two programs have produced hundreds of highly polished, instructive, age-appropriate videos, games, curricula, and lesson plans, all available free to teachers and students.

LRE also conducts courses across our state to equip teachers with the latest techniques and tools. Last year, LRE provided 125 separate teacher training sessions, educating 7,300 participants. Those LRE-trained teachers taught roughly 271,000 students last year alone. Over its 33-year history, LRE's efforts have enriched the lives of literally millions of young Texans.

Some LRE resources—such as the superb *Seven Principles of the U.S. Constitution* video series debuting next month—are ostensibly formulated to help our students achieve the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills, or TEKS, standards. But by any standard that matters, we are not about the business of teaching some test. Through LRE, you and I are about the business of minting citizens.

By learning about old dead people?

History is the soft storehouse of our identity as Americans—the cognitive workbench for our apprenticeship as citizens. It's irreducibly practical. As the actor and writer Stephen Fry observed, "History is not abstraction, it is the enemy of abstraction." In some fundamental way, history is not only about the past. Actually, I wonder if it's about the past at all.

Why should we care?

First, because it's required. The State Bar Act formed our bar "in order that the *public responsibilities* of the legal profession may be more effectively discharged." LRE is one way we discharge those responsibilities.

But more importantly, we care because—*especially* as lawyers—we need to ensure an ample supply of teachers and vot-

ers, legislators and judges, law students and jurors, police officers and attorneys sufficiently skilled in the craft of citizenship to explain and pass, write and interpret, learn and apply, enforce and advance our laws.

According to your mail, we're doing a great job.

In the pandemonium I call my office, and on the mayhem I call my desk, is a stack of letters, cards, and emails—all sent by Texas teachers to you as Texas lawyers. These teachers recently attended your LRE training, typically expending vacation time to do so. They're from everywhere—this batch from Abilene and Amarillo to Weatherford and Wichita Falls.

They are identical in one critical respect—their authentic expression of gratitude. The LRE training and resources provide "real, useable lessons" that are "beautiful," "complete," "ready to go," "wonderful," "timely, essential, and pertinent," and "amazing." Teachers are "excited at the prospect of employing what they learned in their classes" and "the printer and laminator are flying" to get the LRE materials circulated throughout each school.

Many lavishly praise LRE Director Jan Miller—who spent 10 years as a teacher and administrator before coming to the State Bar 24 years ago—and Jan's staff. Most touching of all are the many letters thanking us for "the gracious gift of feeling supported and appreciated."

You didn't know that because I've been getting your mail.

Maybe July's not too bad a time to reflect upon the cultural currency conferred by our shared history as Americans committed to the rule of law—and especially upon the role lawyers play in it. The guy on the nickel—Thomas Jefferson—was the principal drafter of the Declaration of Independence. He also was a lawyer—handling over 900 cases during his legal career—as were 24 of the other 55 men who signed that document.

And what a document! When the guy on the quarter—George Washington—read it to his besieged army in New York City, his inspired troops repurposed a nearby statue of George III into 42,000 musket balls. And the guy on the penny—Abraham Lincoln—was also a lawyer; he used that declaration signed "four score and seven years" earlier to present at Gettysburg the high principles the Civil War was "testing."

They are tested still.

We don't study history for history's sake, but for our own. And an indifference to history cannot beggar our past, only our future. As lawyers, we cannot be detached—and we haven't been. You've profoundly helped the people with whom our state has placed this imperative, and they've written to thank you, over and over again.

And since it all came to me, I wanted to be sure you got your mail.



FRANK STEVENSON

President, State Bar of Texas