

Memphis City Council puts a spotlight on Pike statue, Freemasons, and the KKK

by Anton Chaitkin

The City Council of Memphis, Tennessee debated and voted 6-6 on March 8 on a resolution requesting the removal of the United States National Monument honoring Ku Klux Klan founder Albert Pike from its position in Judiciary Square in Washington, D. C. In a politically charged atmosphere, the council heard testimony on the Pike question from 18 citizens. Excerpts from the discussion are given below.

The resolution had been introduced by Councilman James Ford, a member of a distinguished African-American political family with great experience in standing up to the political establishment. The councilman's brother is Rep. Harold Ford (D-Tenn.), who successfully defeated a politically motivated prosecution by the Justice Department under President George Bush.

In the two days prior to the council meeting, several radio programs and public meetings by former Democratic vice-presidential candidate Rev. James Bevel, Washington Pike campaign organizer Dennis Speed, and historian Anton Chaitkin brought the issue of the Pike statue and some explosive matters related to it before a wide audience in the Tennessee, Mississippi, and Arkansas region around Memphis.

Best known among the speakers opposing the resolution was Shelby Foote, who appeared as the "soft-spoken southern historian" in Ken Burns's television series on the Civil War on the Public Broadcasting System. In the Memphis City Council, however, Foote represented the Treason School of History, putting the satanic mass murderer and Confederate general Albert Pike on the same plane as President George Washington.

The spokesman for the Sons of Confederate Veterans threatened the council with "the consequences" they would suffer if they crossed the B'nai B'rith and voted to take down the Pike memorial statue.

The president of the local chapter of the United Daughters of the Confederacy, who is also the Shelby County treasurer for the UDC council and vice president of the Confederate Library and Research Center, denounced the resolution as an attack on her Confederate ancestors. She neglected to note that Pike was a Bostonian.

Speaking for the resolution, Rev. James Bevel also demanded a fair trial for James Earl Ray after 25 years in prison. Ray was convicted of the Martin Luther King assassination in Memphis, when the court and his lawyer contrived for him

to plead guilty, against his will. During the council meeting, the only time the entire audience, black and white, nodded their agreement, was when Reverend Bevel asked for justice for Ray.

Reverend Bevel amplified the demand at a well-attended press conference the day after the council meeting, telling TV and newspaper reporters that there could be no justice in America with Ray languishing in prison. Bevel compared the role of FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover to that of Albert Pike: Hoover, he said, was in effect the "chief judiciary officer of the Ku Klux Klan." Bevel and Anton Chaitkin pointed out that Hoover's FBI and the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith had Dr. King under surveillance and attempted to destroy him politically, prior to King's assassination. If Ray gets a trial, a very large can of worms will be opened.

The Memphis City Council's political brawl over the Pike matter will have an impact on politics well beyond Memphis. Though the council's tie vote kills the Pike resolution for at least six months, what came out in the meeting may result in the statue coming down before the council can reconsider its vote. A pro-Pike speaker, apparently out of sync with the lies told by Pike supporters in previous meetings in other cities, praised Tennessee historian Walter Fleming as beloved of the Tennessee and southern establishment. Previous masonic and Confederate speakers have tried to discount or disown Fleming, whose book exposing Pike as the principal founder of the Klan was published in 1905.

When a vote was called for, the presiding officer took a voice vote and quickly announced, "The nays have it." But Councilman Ford, backed up by the audience, requested a roll-call vote. The council members were forced to come out on the record. All six black members voted for the resolution. The six (of the seven) white members who were present voted against, and the tie vote killed the resolution.

The council's racially divided vote was a front-page story in the next morning's Memphis *Commercial Appeal*. The newspaper account quoted only from opponents of the measure. Among the documents presented to the city council members was a 1974 historical thesis by a Fisk University graduate student, detailing how Albert Pike used his ownership of that very newspaper to run his Klan terrorists and to intimidate Memphis police.



Rev. James Bevel (left) and Anton Chaitkin speak to the press in Memphis about the resolution before the city council calling for removing the statue of Confederate general and KKK founder Albert Pike, from its place of honor in Washington's Judiciary Square.

Excerpts from statements before the Memphis City Council

Except where indicated, the citizens who testified did not give their affiliations.

Steve McIntyre

I just want to come up to say my piece about General Pike. I think he's being slandered quite a bit. I don't know that Mr. Anton Chaitkin, who claims to be a historian, he produces—if he can produce any actual evidence that General Pike was a founder or member of the Ku Klux Klan. In this day and time, just bringing up the name Ku Klux Klan, associating a person's name with it, automatically condemns him.

In particular, one of the historical references that Mr. Chaitkin gave that associated General Pike with the Klan is from Walter L. Fleming. Mr. Fleming was a historian in the early part of the century who documented Reconstruction, indeed from a southern point of view. However, all historians since have credited Mr. Fleming with being extremely unbiased in his dealings with Reconstruction, both from the southern and northern point of view. W.E.B. Du Bois, who wrote the definitive history of Reconstruction from the black Americans' point of view, admitted himself that, while Mr. Fleming's treatment of Reconstruction was conservative, it was extremely unbiased.

Basically, having researched all of Mr. Fleming's, or Dr. Fleming's, published work, I can find no reference to General

Pike in any of his works. And I state again that Mr. Chaitkin has used Mr. Fleming as a source, a historical source linking General Pike to the KKK, and in all of Walter Fleming's works I could find no reference.

William Rolan

I represent the Sons of Confederate Veterans, and one of our main concerns is history. One of our most critical concerns is the distortion and the perversion of history for the sake of political motive. And I think that that's what we're dealing with here. I think it's unfair, under any circumstances, to take one portion of a man's life, no matter what that portion is—unless he was an outright criminal of some kind, like in the mode of a Jesse James or a Billy the Kid—but to take one portion of any man's life and emphasize that over the sum and the total of his life. And I think that's what's being done here.

And I think that, *more* inappropriately, it's being used to propel a resolution being put forth by an organization that has been called by the B'nai B'rith, for one, highly anti-Semitic, and holds what I would say were pretty peculiar positions. And I think that if the city council were to approve this resolution, that the repercussions, or the consequences, may come back, and that this resolution would be used as giving credibility to an organization which perhaps you do not want to endorse.

Once again I say our position is a historical one. In our research of Albert Pike what we have found [is] that he was a great friend of the Native American, the American Indian. He fought throughout his life before and after the war, to ensure that the treaties for the American Indian were kept by

the United States government. He was a noted jurist, a poet. As some of the councilmen—Councilman Moore knows. He was the editor of the *Commercial Appeal* at one time. And he contributed to this city, in his writings and so forth. He brought the newspaper back, whatever its editorial policy may have been, he brought it back to life when there was very little publishing being done here.

Shelby Foote

This Albert Pike handout has a paragraph that begins, "At this time in our nation's history, when we are perhaps more deeply divided as a people than ever. . . ." There must be something wrong there. He's overlooked a four-year interlude called the Civil War. And besides, I thought we were less deeply divided than ever. I think, I feel that we are closer together than we have ever been in our history, especially with relations of blacks and whites.

The subject this evening, though, is Albert Pike. Pike was a Confederate brigadier general for a period of about one year. He was a champion of the Indians all of his life. He was a masonic leader. He was president of the Tennessee Bar Association. He got many honors in his life, and was greatly revered by a great many people.

John Keats said once that "there's no man who can't be carved up on his wrong side." You can take almost anybody in our history, from Andrew Jackson to George Washington on down, and give good reasons for tearing his statue down. I hope, fervently, that you won't take the misrepresentations in such things as this sheet. [Lyndon] LaRouche sent some kind of flack down here named Anton Chaitkin, who came down masquerading as a historian. I hope you won't pay any attention to him, either.

The tearing down of statues I think we ought to leave to the Russians. They do it quite well. We don't do that, as a general thing, and I hope you won't do it in this case.

Greg Todd

Let's get on with our *good* relations, and not have people stirring up blacks against whites over statues.

Harry Bryant

There's no evidence that Mr. Pike belonged to the Klan. And if he *did*, it's still the statue that was put up by the Freemasons. And I'm not representing them, but I spoke to a very high-ranking Freemason here in Memphis. It's their statue, they're concerned too. And if Mr. Ford wants to pursue it, maybe it should come from his paycheck, because somebody's going to have to pay for it.

Mr. Abdullah

There've been 30 city councils that have made a resolution to remove the Albert Pike statue. The Black Caucus of Tennessee has made a move to remove the Albert Pike statue. The Albert Pike statue is more than a statue. It's a symbol of

oppression. This isn't the 1800s, this is the 1900s, we're going into the 21st century.

If the Masons would like to have this statue, let them have it. Let them pay for it. I don't want my tax money paying for a symbol of oppression for my children, my grandchildren, and my great-grandchildren. So let's send a message, that Memphis *is about to end its marriage with the Ku Klux Klan*.

City Councilman Shep Wilburn

I hope that we would go ahead and remove a symbol that represents something that inflames, that infuriates, and that indeed is an insult to a lot of people. If we don't, I think that what we're doing is perpetuating racial division not only in this country, in this city, but around the world.

Lee Miller

The city council should not want to associate themselves with Lyndon LaRouche or Louis Farrakhan or any of those others who have a *political* agenda behind tearing down statues.

Rev. James Bevel

I'm James Bevel and I've authored and executed the right to vote and the freedom rides, the Mississippi project of '54, the Chicago Open Housing movement, and most of the actions that took place in the '60s, using Christian principles to address constitutional violations and problems.

And, of course, I was here on April 4 when Dr. King was murdered. It was April 4 in 1898 that Congress, based on false information, passed the resolution [to] put up the Pike statue, because the information pertaining to this man's life was not known. Not in relationship to anybody who has a problem with him, I did my own research in books . . . printed before the controversy came up depicting the life of Mr. Pike.

Now I don't know whether these people [the previous speakers] are just misinformed, or just do not want to tell the truth. I have nothing one way or the other against this man. If you go to the library, pull out books on Pike, not by people who are against him, they explicitly point out he burned, murdered, and killed black people enforcing the policies of the Ku Klux Klan. It has nothing to do with any political agenda.

Now maybe that's fine with you. We need to get that kind of issue cleared up. However, I will come back, because I want Mr. Ford to produce another resolution, which is to give James Earl Ray a fair trial, because it's all a part of the same problem, when we don't address justice. You see all of this violence in these children in the streets, comes because we're always covering up and lying about our past. In our religion, in our nation, the way our nation works, is that you have to confess, repent, correct, forgive, and make a motion in the interest of the whole.

Anton Chaitkin

The National Council of Black Mayors, the city of Baltimore, city of Newark, city of New Orleans, Buffalo, many other cities have passed resolutions asking Congress to take down this statue. Why? Albert Pike was the principal founder, the chief strategist, of the Ku Klux Klan after the Civil War. He was the chief justice of the Ku Klux Klan. He was in charge of corrupting justice, corrupting judges, corrupting juries, corrupting police and sheriffs, corrupting the entire legal profession in the South. That was his job, as he saw it.

Pike was first exposed as the boss of the Ku Klux Klan by southern scholars, who approved of the Ku Klux Klan, and who defended Pike's role in the Ku Klux Klan. When Pike's defenders recently tried to say that Pike's statue should stay up—his own group—they said that the Ku Klux Klan was a good group and they circulated that nationally.

Now, what has just taken place here today, I assure you, *will bring the statue down*, without any doubt. I will show you. You heard [about] the principal southern historian, Walter Fleming, the dean of Vanderbilt University, a man who—I don't agree with his principles, but he is credited by pro-Confederate people with being *the* objective scholar. Period. You heard that, right? [Audience: "right"] You [Steve McIntyre] read the wrong version of the book, I guess. Because I'm going to give to the city council what's gone all over the world, a photograph of Dr. Fleming's book. It has—[bell rings, shouting, pandemonium while speaker holds up papers]. The largest picture in the middle is Albert Pike. And it has him as "Chief Justice of the Ku Klux Klan."

Dennis Speed

Let me read from Albert Pike. This is from Albert Pike, *Memphis Daily Appeal*, April 16, 1868:

"With negroes for witnesses and jurors, the administration of justice becomes a blasphemous mockery. A Loyal League of negroes can cause any white man to be arrested, and can prove any charges it chooses to have made against him.

"The disfranchised people of the South . . . can find no protection for property, liberty or life, except in secret association. . . . We would unite every white man in the South, who is opposed to negro suffrage, into one great Order of Southern Brotherhood, with an organization complete, active, vigorous, in which a few should execute the concentrated will of all," and then, very importantly, "whose very existence should be concealed from all but its members."

What Pike was organizing was the Klan. The Klan was a conspiracy which was a concealed conspiracy. It was because it was treasonous. Just as the charges that were made about the question of Pike are treasonous by the very people that made it here—they *know* they're lying. They know perfectly well they're lying.

And what really hurts me, is that, see, Pike is from Boston, Pike is a carpetbagger, Pike did not come from Mem-

phis. He came down here, and he formed the Klan, and the Klan was a carpetbagger organization. Now see, my parents come from Alabama. So, in order to defend the dignity of the South, I come here to try to say, take the statue down and stop saying that the South is Klan. And these fools continue to defend that organization.

I say the statue should come down. I think the Masons can have it. I'm not for tearing it down. Let the statue be moved down the street, to 16th Street in Washington, D.C. I would be glad to *organize* people to go see the statue. But I don't want it in Judiciary Square, which represents law in our country, and the Klan represents lawlessness.

Councilman James Ford

One of the gentlemen who spoke asked what was my motive for doing this. Prior to several months ago, I guess I was somewhat ignorant to it. I don't boast on being . . . any kind of historian. But I have done a little reading and a little research on this particular issue. I'm going to make some statements, and I'm going to make them very authoritative, because from my readings and my own opinion about this . . . this gentleman was definitely one of the founders and maybe . . . the Grand Dragon of the KKK. . . . I have no problems with statues of anybody. . . . But I have problems when statues are paid [for] by my tax dollars, to keep it clean. And this particular statue requires a whole lot of *guarding*. And we've got to pay the tax dollars to guard it . . . on a continuous basis. . . . I have another problem with this one, though, too. It stands in Judiciary Square! . . . I have a problem with that. [Pike was] somebody who probably was totally against all of those principles [of justice], no matter what the historians say. I'm just deducing from what *I have read* and what *I know* about this gentleman.

He did some good things. He organized the Freemasons. He wrote their rituals. He did a lot of positive things for the Indians. . . . One time there was a massacre when they killed so many U.S. soldiers, and he almost went to jail, and got indicted on that. He [was the Indians' attorney], and I'm sure there was a lot of money remuneration when you're an attorney. . . .

He wrote the ritual for the Masons, but there is some evidence that he even wrote the rituals for the Grand KKK too. . . . There are many municipalities, large and small, all across the nation, that have passed resolutions for this statue to be removed. . . . Most of these councils are not black councils; these are white councils, a majority of them. They have looked at the history and they have reached the same conclusions. . . .

This resolution . . . [is to have] the President and the Congress . . . [take the necessary action] to have this statue removed from where it is . . . so it is not paid for by our tax dollars. Now if that divides, if that polarizes, let it so polarize and let it so divide, and that's just the way the cookie crumbles!