

The Missing Monument on the National Mall - A Tribute to Norman Borlaug on His 102nd Birth Anniversary

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When Speaker Paul Ryan walks out onto his balcony on the west side of the Capitol, he has the breathtaking view of the National Mall sweeping to the west, lined with the monuments to America's greatest achievements.

As the Chairman of the State of Iowa Norman Borlaug Statue Committee, I had the opportunity to experience this thrilling sight as we planned the unveiling of the seven foot bronze likeness of Borlaug, the Nobel Peace Prize Laureate and our country's greatest agricultural scientist, which took place in Statuary Hall on March 25, 2014, the exact 100th anniversary of his birth on an Iowa farm.

Straight ahead, I could see the Washington Monument, the symbol of our prevailing in the Revolutionary War and our first president's leadership as we threw off colonial rule. Directly to the south is the Jefferson Memorial, honoring the Virginian who served as our third president and wrote the Declaration of Independence. Along Constitution Avenue is the National Archives, which houses both that Declaration and the Constitution, the two documents that undergird the longest lasting democracy in human history.

At the far end of this broad expanse is the Lincoln Memorial, the enduring tribute to President Abraham Lincoln's historic role in emancipation, ending slavery and keeping the Union intact through victory in the Civil War. Between Washington and Lincoln is the World War II Victory Monument, commemorating the unprecedented accomplishment of "the Greatest Generation" in prevailing in a two front war in the Atlantic and Pacific.

The National Air and Space Museum brings attention to extraordinary American innovation in the 20th century, first on the part of the Wright Brothers in carrying out the first manned airplane flight in history and then only six decades later NASA placing humans on the moon.

As I stood there, I thought to myself that surely most Americans would include all of these historic events on any list of America's greatest accomplishments. But, there are other significant memorials and monuments as well.

Reflecting the contemporary challenge of civil rights is the imposing statue of Martin Luther King, Jr. the martyr who gave his life to bring equality and justice to black Americans. The new African American Museum will commemorate the tortuous path that the descendants of the first Africans who were brought to North America have had to follow as well as their definitive contributions to American culture. As such, it will be the latest extension of the imposing Smithsonian Institute on the Mall, which catalogues our history and place in the world.

Also on the Mall are the Korean War and Vietnam War monuments honoring the valor and sacrifices of American military personnel in those difficult struggles and which, in the case of the latter, I participated. The National Holocaust Museum ensures that our national attention will always include and reflect the impact of the genocide that took the lives six million Jews.

But as my gaze spanned all of these incredible edifices, I noticed that there is one extraordinary American achievement which has no monument or national recognition - our country's amazing food production and the underlying pageantry of American agriculture. It is an egregious omission.

In the 10,000 years since the first farmers in Mesopotamia - almost certainly women - planted the first wheat seeds, human beings have strived to produce enough food to sustain all the members of their community. No country has ever succeeded in the way that America has.

Indeed, the combination of highly productive hard working farm families, the greatest ever assemblage of agricultural research scientists on the campuses of land grant institutions, the technological advances and innovations of American agribusinesses, and the programs and policies of the U.S. Department of Agriculture and its extension

agents, have all combined to produce crop yields and food production unrivaled in the world.

The bottom line is that in the past 60 years, America, through its domestic farm efficiency and foreign assistance programs led “the single greatest period of food production and hunger reduction in all human history.”

And yet, this achievement is little recognized outside the relatively small American agricultural community, and all too often the availability of food at quite cheap prices is taken for granted.

As I stood there, I took some solace that with Borlaug’s statue ensconced in the U.S. Capitol, it would serve as a symbol of our extraordinary agricultural attainments. But it still seemed that a monument on the National Mall was missing.

So, at a recent White House conference on Raising the Profile of Agriculture, I proposed several additional steps related to Norman Borlaug’s legacy that could further advance understanding of our great national achievement in agriculture, and, at the same time, provide the inspiration we need as we confront the greatest challenge our country and the world has ever faced: sustainably and nutritiously producing enough food to feed the 9 plus billion people who will be on our planet by 2050.

As we celebrate the 102nd anniversary of his birth, consider the following:

- Borlaug, the Iowa farm boy who received the Nobel Peace Prize for his role as Father of the Green Revolution and for bringing greatly increased wheat production to India and Pakistan as they faced imminent mass starvation, has been described as the, “Man who has saved more lives than any other person who has ever lived.”

- On the base of his statue in Statuary Hall of the U.S. Capitol is the statement, “The Man Who Saved A Billion Lives.” On the front are replicas of his Nobel Peace Prize medal, Congressional Gold Medal and Presidential Medal of Freedom. In all the history of our country, there are only three Americans who have received those three highest

awards: Martin Luther King, Jr. And Elie Wiesel, the Holocaust survivor, both of whom have monuments honoring them on the Mall; and that farm boy from Howard County in northeast Iowa - Norman Borlaug;

- Borlaug is arguably, in terms of life achievements, the single greatest graduate of the American land-grant university and college system, since it was created in 1862 when Abraham Lincoln signed the Morrill Act providing federal land for a system of universities which would conduct agricultural research and extension and train engineers to build roads and support infrastructure.

- He is not just an American icon. Statues of Borlaug have been erected by farmers in Mexico and scientists in India. His last words "Take it to the farmer" was the theme of the Ugandan National Agricultural Fair. And, most extraordinarily, the Agricultural Biotechnology Research Institute of Iran held a special ceremony to celebrate the centennial of his birth.

- Borlaug was the founder of the World Food Prize Foundation that I currently lead. He created it in 1986 with the goal that it might come to be seen as the, "Nobel Prize for Food and Agriculture." Each October, on or about World Food Day (October 16), we welcome about 1,200 participants from 60 countries to Des Moines as we: hold our Borlaug Dialogue international symposium; present our \$250,000 award; and gather 200 high school students and their teachers at our Global Youth Institute. This October 12-14, we will celebrate our 30th anniversary.

Given all of the above, I believe Norman Borlaug offers the opportunity to raise the profile of agriculture in America and inspire the next generation to pursue education and careers in agricultural science and STEM related subjects. To this end, I recommended at the White House that the following take place:

- Establishing March 25, the anniversary of Borlaug's birth in 1914, as the permanent date for National Ag Day, when traditionally farm and agriculture related groups, including FFA and 4-H, descend on Washington;

- Encouraging all land grant colleges and universities to offer an entry level class entitled BORLAUG 101 on the history of food and agriculture;
- Urging those same institutions of higher learning to inaugurate or expand a World Food Prize Youth Institute on their campus, with a goal of reaching into every high school in their state, to motivate students to study STEM subjects and become engaged in 21st century challenges such as climate volatility; water scarcity; biotechnology; enhanced nutrition; and sustainability; and
- Making a public call to place a monument on the National Mall or Capitol grounds dedicated to honoring all those who made American agriculture and food production one of the greatest achievements in the history of our republic.

Such a monument could include Borlaug, with his links to several land-grant universities, but might also honor such other historic American figures as: George Washington Carver, the legendary African American agricultural scientist; Jessie Field Shambaugh, the woman school teacher whose after school clubs grew into 4-H; agribusiness pioneer and Agriculture Secretary Henry A. Wallace.

Most significantly, any monument should also include a pioneer farm family, representing the thousands and thousands of families that have, over multiple generations, diligently worked the soil and built the foundation of America which enabled our country to endure and prosper and feed so much of the world. In that same regard, key crops and farm animals would somehow need to be represented.

America has rarely been so bitterly divided politically, with the presidential and Supreme Court nomination processes exacerbating differences. And yet, in the midst of this acerbic division, Norman Borlaug and his legacy of combating hunger offer a rare opportunity to bring politicians, educators, business executives, NGO leaders and farm, agriculture and commodity group representatives together around a common objective - the creation of a monument to that one great American achievement that is not yet honored on our most important national place of recognition.

Given Speaker Ryan's own rural Wisconsin background and his great personal respect for Dr. Borlaug, (he and his wife were there when Borlaug's statue was unveiled), my hope is that the Speaker might indeed see that March 25 is indeed the moment to begin this process.

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