

Replies to a White Racial Activist
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In June of 2009, a white racial activist e-mailed me some questions about my writing and current activities. He said he would share my answers with the members of the white advocacy organization he heads. I answer the questions here.

A number of the questions relate to a book of mine published in 2001, *The Fame of a Dead Man's Deeds*. I wrote two subsequent books and a number of articles on race from a white perspective, but the *Fame* book has been the one that racially conscious whites have found most meaningful to them. *Fame* is a portrait of Dr. William Pierce, who chaired the National Alliance, a white advocacy organization he started in the 1970s, from its inception until his death in 2002. Dr. Pierce was demonized and vilified by those who dominate the mainstream public discourse as a violence-advocating racist and anti-Semite—one Jewish group referred to him as “the most dangerous man in America.” He came to the general public’s attention in the mid-1990s, when it was widely assumed that his apocalyptic novel *The Turner Diaries* had provided the blueprint for the bombing of the Murrah Building in Oklahoma City by Timothy McVeigh. Shortly before McVeigh’s execution for that act McVeigh denied that he was inspired by the book, but the public perception remains that he was.

I had not known of Dr. Pierce (he was a Ph.D in physics and prior to his racial work he had been a tenured professor of physics at Oregon State University) before Oklahoma City. Media reports of this mysterious and menacing figure barricaded in a guarded compound in West Virginia piqued my interest. Who is this Pierce? I asked myself. What is he up to? What accounts for him? I managed to contact him, this was in the fall of 1997, and proposed that I spend time with him and write a book about him. He agreed to that, and I spent the summer of 1998 with him and those around him in West Virginia and traveled with him in Europe where he spoke at political rallies. I conducted thirty hours of audio taped interviews with him and investigated writings and people and organizations that helped me understand him and his milieu. I put everything I had learned and concluded together in a book manuscript by early 1999. The title came last—I had the hardest time coming up with

one. Finally, when *The Fame of a Dead Man's Deeds* popped into my head, I knew immediately that was the one—it was as if the title had been waiting for me to discover it.

I describe the *Fame* book in my web site, www.robertsgriffin.com:

The book recounts Pierce's personal story from childhood on, identifies what shaped his thinking and actions, outlines his perspective on the issues of the day, and describes his day-to-day routine. . . . I recount Pierce's views on history, philosophy, race, politics, economics, international relations, the media, education, men-women identities and relations, childrearing practices, and approaches to leisure. I found Pierce to be a person of remarkable capability, decency, integrity, courage, and dedication. As impressed as I was with Pierce, however, I tried to be as objective and complete as I could in portraying him, and that included dealing with his limitations. I was particularly struck by the contrast between the man I came to know and the demonic, sinister picture of him I had gotten from the mass media. I hit me how much of what I know, or think I know, comes from mediated rather than direct experience. That is to say, someone—a teacher, a media figure, a politician, an advocate for a cause--tells me and shows me what something is like. If Pierce isn't as he has been depicted, I asked myself, what else isn't as it has been presented to me? Who are these mediators of reality? What are their interests, what are they selling? This book changed my life forever. I came away from my encounter with Pierce far more conscious of race from a white perspective and of myself as a white man and of my European cultural and historical roots.

My literary agent was enthused about the *Fame* book's merits and sales potential. He believed that with the promotional backing of a major publisher it could be a bestseller. However, the fifteen publishers he submitted the manuscript to—this was in 2000—all passed on it, saying that the quality was good but that there was no market for it, it wouldn't sell. I suspected that their objections to the book had more to do with its contents than its marketability; in particular, Pierce's white allegiance and his negative critique of the Jewish impact on American culture and foreign policy. Whatever was actually behind the publishers' rejections, rather than put it in

a drawer and forget about it, which was my first impulse, I put it out as an e-book and then used the proceeds from e-book sales to produce a soft cover edition. I haven't kept an accurate count, but I estimate it has sold around 12,000 copies world wide, which is a good number for a book that has not had the support of a big publisher and media exposure. For the most part, people haven't heard of the *Fame* book or me, but for a relative few the book has had made a difference in their lives. Many racially conscious whites revere, and deeply miss, Dr. Pierce—his death was sudden and unexpected—and derive direction and inspiration from his life example and message.

I have published two books on the subject of race since *Fame*. *One Sheaf, One Vine* is made up of the personal statements of seventeen racially conscious white Americans. *Living White* is a collection of my short writings on race from 2000-2005. They can be obtained from Amazon.com. My short writings on race since 2005 are on my web site.

Now to my replies to the questions. In a couple of instances, I pair up questions because they seem to me to go together.

Please tell us a little bit about yourself.

I am a professor of education at the University of Vermont approaching retirement. I am from a low-income background and grew up in the Middle West and came to Vermont thirty-five years ago. I have wide ranging interests, including the arts. I have two grown children and a young daughter who lives with her mother in another state. My writings over the last decade have contained an autobiographical dimension. *Fame* was my story as well as Dr. Pierce's—discerning readers will notice that I'm different, the authorial voice is different, at the end of the book than I/it was at the beginning. I have been a player, as it were, in my short writings—virtually all of them contain personal references and cues about what is going on with me. Although I didn't intend them to be, the thoughts on my web site, beginning with the first one written in 2007 about Michel Foucault on through to the most recent, are an autobiography of sorts.

What are your credentials?

I assume you mean for the race-oriented writing. I have a Ph.D. and am informed about a wide range of topics, and I am curious and perceptive and thoughtful, or I think so, anyway. I'm an honorable person, I believe, and, when the situation calls for it, persevering and courageous. I like to think I can write accessible and engaging prose without compromising conceptual nuance. But really, the credential that matters for anything is my track record: do my expressions, including my writings, have worth? I continually assess myself with regard to that question, and of course those who hear and read what I say assess the results I achieve as well.

Tell us about The Fame of Dead Man's Deeds.

The introductory remarks above get at this. I find myself frequently re-reading portions of *Fame* and getting something new out of them each time, and I am gratified to hear from a number of people that they do as well. As I re-read the book, along with anything else I take away from it I'm struck by the fact that there was but a brief window of opportunity for me to write the book, and I am very grateful that I took advantage of it. Dr. Pierce died shortly after the book was completed, and I don't believe that even a year or two after I wrote the manuscript that I would have had the personal wherewithal to put all that effort into a work of such complexity and length. The lesson I draw each time I revisit *Fame* is that all of us need to be vigilant to the possibilities that become available to us--work projects, relationships, all of it; because in most cases we only get one shot at them, and if we miss it they are gone forever. At every point in life there is something good to do if you look hard for it, but it isn't the same good thing to do that you had the chance to do last year. There was only one chance for me to write the *Fame* book.

What made you pick that title for it?

"The fame of a dead man's deeds" is from an old Norse poem that meant a great deal to Dr. Pierce.

Cattle die, and kinsman die,
And so one dies oneself;
One thing I know that never dies:

The fame of a dead man's deeds.

Dr. Pierce brought up the poem several times when I was with him. Finally I asked him to tell what it meant to him. "Fame here," he replied, "doesn't mean fame in the way we think of it today— notoriety, having people know who you are, being a celebrity, that kind of thing. In this case, it means your reputation, the impression you make on the world and your fellow man while you are alive. If you live in a way that warrants it, your people will remember you as a person who did great things or was exceptionally wise or just or courageous, whatever it was. That is the only immortality that is real, and that is a kind of immortality that can matter to people and really affect how they live." Dr. Pierce lived for posterity, in particular the future generations of his people, white gentiles, whom he hoped would benefit from his actions and remember his accomplishments. That he was living for history and not just for this time gave his life meaning and thrust, and strengthened his ability to stand up to attacks from his natural adversaries as well as criticism, often harsh, from individuals within the white racial moment.

What inspired you to write it?

Through telling Dr. Pierce's story (and, to a lesser extent, my own), I was able to put forth a critique of American culture and society in an overall and, I hope, interesting way. Dr. Pierce's life example and ideas were absent in the public awareness, and I believed that to be an unfortunate omission, and that it was worth my time to endure all I would have to go through to remedy that circumstance. Also, researching and writing *Fame* was a way for me to identify who I really am and to move forward along my own path in life: it helped me get clearer, stronger, become more of my own person, and happier and more fulfilled than I had been. And simply, writing *Fame* was enjoyable for me: Dr. Pierce was a compelling and fascinating human being, and connecting with his life, and to some extent becoming part of it, was a once-in-a-lifetime adventure.

What do you hope people will take away from The Fame of a Dead Man's Deeds?

I hope people come away from the book with a clear sense of Dr. Pierce's worldview and of the way he held the meaning of his individual life. He was the brightest person I have ever encountered, and whether you accept his perspective or not—I have my differences with it—it is worth your time, as it was mine, to become acquainted with it. Also, I want readers to consider seriously what Dr. Pierce's example implies for what they should be doing with their own lives in the time they have remaining on this earth.

How many copies of the book have you sold?

As I said in the introduction, I would estimate it to be around 12,000.

What do you remember most about Dr. Pierce?

So many things. His commitment to take full advantage of the limited time he would live on this earth. His intellectual brilliance. His integrity; there was the closest possible fit between what he believed and the way he conducted his life. His work ethic and conscientiousness: he worked from morning to night, seven days a week, and he did his absolute best and stuck with it no matter how tough things got, year after year after year, decade after decade. His sincerity: Dr. Pierce was for real, he respected people, he wasn't a cynic or a backbiter. His joy. He had a serious, dour public image, and indeed he could be that way at times. But the side of him I saw most often, and the picture of him in my mind as I write this, is a cheerful, positive, smiling man that cherished each moment of being alive. And his decency and kindness, including toward me.

What advice would you give to those who wish to live selfless lives like Dr. Pierce?

I wouldn't say that Dr. Pierce lived a selfless life. I would characterize him as living a self-*full* life. Dr. Pierce was committed to serving his people, but he did that grounded in the person that he was; most every aspect of his life, including his service to his race, expressed and uplifted his own being, enhanced the quality of his own experience. As for what advice I would give people who

would look to Dr. Pierce for direction, I would suggest that they keep in mind that they are not him. Dr. Pierce was who he was, and he did what fit him. We need to be, I believe, who we uniquely are, and to do what uniquely fits us. We can be guided and inspired by Dr. Pierce's example, but it won't work to try to copy him. We have to make our way in life as the people we are—our particular genetic make-up and personal histories and strengths and weaknesses and predilections—and within the particular circumstances of our lives. I'm here now and you are there now, and Dr. Pierce was where he was then. I believe what the world most needs from each of us is the best possible version of the unique human being we are. Dr. Pierce was a fine though not perfect—no one's perfect--example of that. He lived very much as the person he truly was.

What other books have you written?

I've written seven books. The ones that count for me, however, are the last five: the three books on race; a book on sports and kids, *Sports in the Lives of Children and Adolescents*; and a collection of essays on education called *While There Is Time*. Since 2006, I have focused on short writing. And since 2007 all of my writing has been disseminated through my web site, and, as it has turned out, very little of that deals with race. I care deeply about white racial matters, but I don't view myself as a racial activist, or as a racial writer per se, and I'm not an organization person. I am committed to expressing whatever is within me pressing to be articulated as honestly and completely as I can, and if it is about race, so be it, and if it is not, so be that too. I have many interests, and the web site has given me the vehicle to reflect that. I'm not trying to keep anything going; every writing, and this is especially true the past six months or so, feels like my last one, including this response to your questions. This could be my last writing, I don't know.

Has your employer said anything about the books you have written?

I am a tenured full professor, and that gives me more protection from attack than anybody I can think of. It appears that unless it is pushed to attend to my racially oriented work, the university—faculty, administrators--ignores it. When I have been subjected to outside criticism, the university has defended me. Just this week,

there have been a newspaper story and a journal article about me critical of me around race. In the newspaper story, a representative from my university was quoted as saying, “We have an obligation to protect our faculty’s right to academic freedom and freedom of speech. In the journal article, a colleague of mine noted that he has “never seen from him [me] an anti-Semitic remark, never heard him make a racist remark.” Those who know me realize that being a white analyst, advocate, or activist does not mean I harbor ill will toward other people. I sincerely wish every human being on this planet well.

Have your books had any impact on your career? Has writing your books changed your life in any way?

I chose to put two of your questions together because I don’t separate my career from the rest of my life; it’s all of a piece. My books have enhanced my career—all of my writing has. My writing has helped me move closer to becoming the person I truly am and has given me direction and motivation in both the public and private realms of my life. I’ve developed courses I teach at the university that grew out of my investigations and writing. I’m not accumulating accolades and plaques on my office wall for what I am doing around race or any of my other concerns, that’s for sure, but I truly believe that I am doing what I should be doing. I regret taking so long—deep into middle age—to begin approximating who I uniquely am, all that time wasted that I’ll never get back; but at least, in the late evening of my life, it happened, and it’s very gratifying to me. I wish I had more time than I do—I feel as if I am standing on a trap door, and the reality is, at this late stage of my life, I am standing on a trap door that is going to spring soon. But still, these days I feel a pervasive sense of satisfaction with life, and a peacefulness, that I’ve never known before.

How are you doing now? Do you have plans to write any more books in the future?

Now I’m writing out the answers to your questions. I don’t mean to sound flip saying that; I know your question has to do with my work activities, my public endeavors, and I’ll get to that. But before I do that, I want to communicate a sense of my essentially existential—I

think that term gets at it—perspective, posture, these days. I have plans and hopes for the future (although, I find that at this age they never go beyond five years into the future), and I think about where it has come from for me and what it all means, but basically, and increasingly, life for me has come down to engaging, embracing, this moment, and then the next moment, and then the next one and the next one and the next and the next and the next. It's 3:35 on a Saturday afternoon and I'm at my computer in my office at the university. I have one more of your questions to answer and then I'm going to the store and pick up a bottle of red wine. From there I'll go home and cook dinner—chicken and vegetables—and I'll have a glass of the wine. Tonight I plan to read some of a new biography of the short story writer Donald Barthelme, and later on I'll watch a French film from the 1960s called "Le Bonheur" (Happiness), Agnes Varda the director. And then, truth be told, I'll probably channel surf on television a bit, a habit I'm trying to break (my last writing for the web site is called "Channel Surf"), and then I'll go to bed, and then it will be morning.

In my writing on race over the last few years, including the book *Living White*, I have underscored the reality and importance of our individual lives, the fact that we, each of us, one by one, are alive, and finite, and that that personal, individual reality accompanies the public realities, race among them, that will persist after we no longer exist. We are going to die—me, likely, far sooner than you, but you too—and, as I see it, we need to attend as much to our own existence as we do to the state of the world and to posterity. We need to create a life for ourselves where the private and public aspects of our being form a complimentary, mutually enhancing, harmonious whole. It matters what happens to the white race, but so too does it matter what happens to you and me. It matters that we are happy and well and love and are loved and are at peace. We aren't sacrificial beings; we have the right and the responsibility to ourselves to integrate service and self-fulfillment. Dr. Pierce did that very well indeed, although not completely well. If life involves resolving the issues of work and love, arguably Dr. Pierce did much better with work than he did with love. And while his final illness was most likely unavoidable, it's my sense that he could have taken better care of his health. We can learn from his example in those problematic areas of his life as well as from his remarkable personal qualities and accomplishments.

But to answer the question as I'm sure you meant it: I'm essentially off during the summer—professors tend to be on nine-month contracts. I don't teach again until the fall. Then, I'll be instructing a course on the mass media, a course on sport in society, and an introductory course in education that arts and sciences students take as an elective; I'm doing some planning with those courses. I don't have writing plans beyond completing this questionnaire. I don't expect to write any more books. Commercial publishers and university presses aren't interested in what I have to say, and I very much doubt that I'll ever again have the energy to go through all that I had to in order to self-publish and disseminate the three books on race. I don't feel up to dealing with journal and magazine editors, negotiating this and that point in an article or essay and waiting for a year or more to see something get into print. So that brings it down to writing for the web site, which gives me total control of topic and approach and instant publication. But as I have been saying, the web site could end any time. In general, the world isn't beating a path to my door these days, and I find that I'm not up to beating a path to the world's door. It may be that I have reached the point in life that I presume we all come to if we live long enough, where the mark we make on the world, at least on the world at large, if any, has already been made.

In any case, I'm now going to go get the bottle of wine. I hope I have done reasonable justice to your questions. I wish you health and happiness, and that when you are a dead man your fame burns bright.