

Obama Is No Seth Adams

Like most people, from time to time I get in my head a melody that comes from out of nowhere and leads me to reflect on the past. Today it was the theme from the 1957–1965 television series *Wagon Train*. The western starred Ward Bond, a close friend of John Wayne, with whom he appeared in several films, including 1930's *The Big Trail*.

Bond, as wagon master Major Seth Adams, was the grizzled veteran who led the pioneers in their rickety, horse-drawn wagons from Missouri to California. Those brave travelers did not want a greenhorn leading them to the promised land. They certainly did not choose an arrogant, young, inexperienced, smooth-talker who drifted into town wearing a shiny suit with sharp creases and offering persuasive promises. No, they wanted someone with the experience, the insight, the knowledge, and the wisdom to get their wagons out of the snow, over the prairies, across the rivers, and through the deserts. Any decision to ration the food and water, put an injured horse out of its misery, or circle the wagons for a showdown with the Indians would be his. He would be their leader, and in his hands the settlers placed their trust and their confidence.

Ward Bond made it through only a few seasons before his sudden death meant another actor got his job, and the 1870s are long past. But, for many, the spirit of America that was in those wagon trains still exists. The pioneers believed in the promise of their futures, as do Americans today. The pioneers had confidence in themselves, and sought only the freedom to start a family farm, a general store, or a blacksmith shop. They did not ask for handouts from the government. They sought no “public assistance,” they sought only the help of a wagon master to lead them to their destinies—and they paid him for his efforts.

Yes, the 1870s are behind us, but the nation still faces dangers, and it still needs experienced leaders. In 2008 it had only two applicants for the job of wagon master, and neither was up to the task. The American pioneers rejected the grumpy old-timer who was better suited for the role of Charlie Wooster, the wagon train's cook, and chose instead the arrogant and prissy snake-oil salesman from the big city—who offered a discount price and talked a lot about his abilities but had in fact never sat on top of a horse in his life.

The American wagon train is now wandering aimlessly, turning mostly to the left, while the hapless wagon master tries to figure out how to use a compass. Half the wagons are broken down, the horses are exhausted, the supplies are low—and wagon master Barry is busy rounding up settler's signatures to renew his contract. The more foolhardy among them sign on the dotted line, reluctantly consoling themselves with the thought, “Well, he's probably right that you can't get from Missouri to California in only four years so, all right, we'd better give him eight.”

Meanwhile, some of the settlers—among them Sarah, Rick, and Michele—are getting ready to stage an uprising. Not only do they know how to use a compass, they have rifles

and aren't afraid to use them against the coyotes, bears, and Indians. (Barry still can't get his pocket knife to open.) They are eager to get the wagon train back on the right path before it is too late. With storm clouds approaching, they will have to cross the creek before it rises but they need to do it without Barry—who is afraid of both lightning and water.

Most of the pioneers will have to get out of the wagons and help. They need to pull with all their might to get them out of the ruts, but they've done it before and aren't afraid to get a little mud or manure on their boots. Granted, it's a little tougher now with the added weight of those know-it-all city slickers, but once the wagons get moving they won't whine so much. They might even enjoy the scenery and stop complaining about the dust, while they sit back and rewrite the history of the journey to make themselves heroes.

It's time to hire a new wagon master and saddle up, pilgrims. Westward ho, the wagons!

Well, at least as far as Utah. California is not quite the same land of promise as it was in 1870...

Don Fredrick
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