

Civil Noncompliance



Guest post by James L. Payne.

As a piano technician I come across many unusual requests, but none so bizarre as one I received some time ago from a man whom I'll call Mr. Green. Could I, he asked, strip the ivory from the keys of a Steinway grand piano?

I was appalled. Applying ivory to piano keys is a fine art. The ivory on each key is two separate pieces that have been color matched, cut, and glued together so carefully that there is no visible seam, then clamped exactly over a special wafer of cloth impregnated with white pigment that gives the translucent ivory a white, lustrous hue. To ask me to undo this fine craftsmanship was preposterous. It would be like asking me to slash the Mona Lisa or blow up Buddhist statues in Afghanistan. I asked Mr. Green why he wanted me to perform this sacrilege.

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