

Fruit of the Poisonous Tree

The lies that resulted in the loss of life at the United States Capitol this week were the inevitable fruit of the poisonous tree. We express no surprise in Wednesday's outcome—the swelling crowds, stirred into believing that they have been disenfranchised, the overrun of police, the overspreading of chaos across the Capitol, penetrating it with the deadly virus of violence. We condemn it, nevertheless.

Though we deplore the civic confusion, we saw it coming. The Trump administration set out to skirt the ethics watchdogs in government early on. Repeated attacks on the news media have meant that the whistleblowers have been effectively muted. Repeated attacks on critics, anybody who threw a flag on the play, meant that they suffered the allegation of self-seeking, and their warnings also rendered ineffective. Baseless lies now motivate the actions of so many, leading us closer than ever to our own destruction.

I pause here as I remember a maxim taught by my friend Brian Wright whose parents never suffered lies in their home. Lying was met with the strictest of consequences because “if you lie, you'll do anything.”

So here we are. President Trump, who maintains a pathologically compromised relationship with truth, stood back and stood by while the crowd he commanded moved on the Capitol. It should have been foreseen that a fringe on the frontline would tragically overstep.

Time and investigation will tell us more about the mental state and culpability of those who scaled walls, broke through barricades and windows, and who in utter disrespect propped their feet upon desks, while daring to pose for selfies. Prosecution, if it is to come, will determine their fate. In the meantime, as a black Christian, several untruths must be confronted—again.

Security Lapse Due to the Failure of Racial Profiling

While President Trump may have incited the crowd that marched on the Capitol, it remains to be seen how involved the administration had been in directing security forces to stand down. As of this writing, the head of the Capitol police has resigned in acknowledgement of the historic lapse in security. But, the fact that they were overwhelmed, outnumbered, or failed to call in reinforcements in advance, was not a failure in the heat of the moment. And, reinforcements from the National Guard arrived an hour after the call from Washington, D.C. mayor, Muriel Bowser according to a Reuters report. It appears, at least now, that the threat was largely underestimated, and woefully dismissed.

The Capitol was stormed one day after prosecutors in Kenosha, Wisconsin announced they would not charge the police officers in the shooting of Jacob Blake. Note the egregious double standard: Blake was unarmed, shot in the back, seven times, while walking away from police, after a domestic disturbance in which he was not involved. Juxtapose this with the spellbinding video of police being brushed aside while thousands of white rioters maneuvered themselves into what we thought would have been one of the most secure settings in the country.

The lie perpetuated is that black skin and black bodies are more dangerous, and suspect, at any given time and circumstance. The lie perpetuated is that one can trust white skin and white bodies, no matter how many, how dangerous, and how much damage done. That is the faulty assumption and failure of racial profiling in a nutshell. And this is the naked, racist truth on display for all the world to see, again.

So, in my black body, contemplating my black husband, and black children, and black friends, I echo a social media meme I saw that day: "It's not that I want them to shoot them. I want them to *not* shoot us, the way they *don't* shoot them."

Looking for the Real Right

The second area of untruth is found in the tangled association with some in the Christian right. As Christians, we winced at the sight of the individual who carried the bright yellow placard heralding "Jesus Saves", or the orange Jesus flag that draped an interloper breaching the House floor. What about the senior, white man carrying the Christian flag?

We can think of nothing about the cause of Jesus that is consistent with the attempt to impede any process by brute force. This, the latest and extreme misappropriation of Christian faith rides a defiant wave. As a Christian publication, we've seen the strident rhetoric ramping up:

"Americans need to resist the 'progressive' push coming from so many influencers in our society, and restore a Christian conscience to our nation," said Tim Wildmon, president of the American Family Association, in a press release we received Monday. "We are in a battle to show America her way back to God."

In the aftermath of Wednesday's breach, another Christian group, Moms For America, sought to discredit the news reports, downplay the danger, and deflect blame on Antifa, and even Black Lives Matter.

"Why am I here?" said Kimberly Fletcher who was on Capitol Hill Wednesday (in her own press release), "[b]ecause freedom is worth fighting for. When my children and grandchildren ask me where I was when the Constitution hung in the balance and the Republic was on the verge of collapse, I will say I was there, on the frontlines, fighting to my last breath to save it!"

Just as racial and political unrest—fueled by mistrust and untruths—have been fomenting for months, so is there unrest among the faithful. Amid conspiracy theories about nano-technology in vaccines that would inhibit the conscience, and first amendment objections to mask mandates, or safety restrictions on the numbers of worshippers at church, believers are in danger of devolving into a spiritual mob. The result is a confusing witness that tends to engender skepticism and resistance here among our youth, and around the world, rather than trust and openness.

One friend told me she received this very question in an email from a sincere Christian, new in the faith, from Afghanistan: "What does 'Jesus Saves' have to do with 'Don't Tread on Me?'"

Stay Sober, My Friends

As lawyer, activist, and song writer James Weldon Johnson penned the song "Lift Ev'ry Voice and Sing" more than one hundred years ago, sober vigilance in these last days is a tall order. We must protect discernment,

act in truth, and reject the temptation to corrupt it for personal gain.
Lest our feet stray from the places, our God, where we met Thee,
Lest, our hearts drunk with the wine of the world, we forget Thee;
Shadowed beneath Thy hand,
May we forever stand,
True to our God,
True to our native land.